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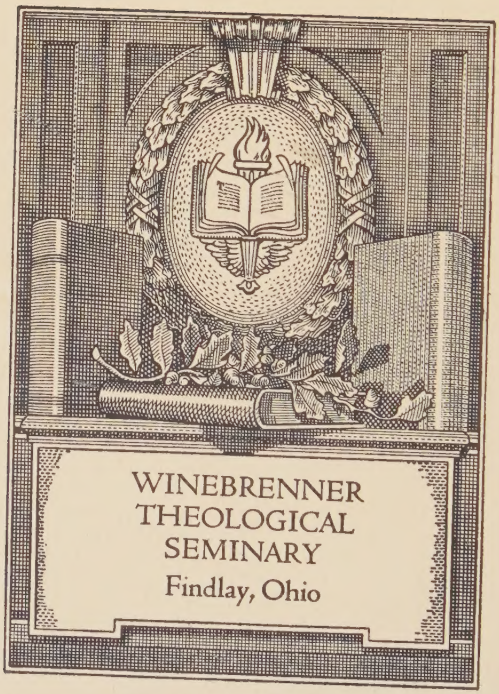

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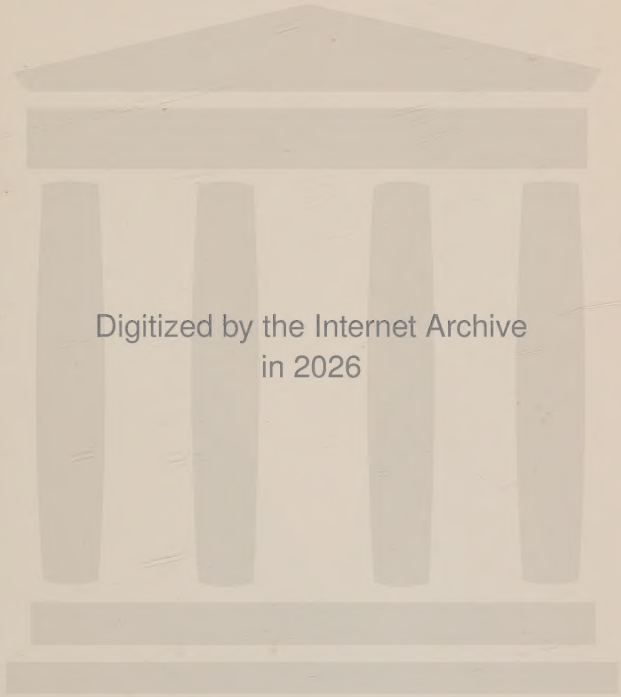
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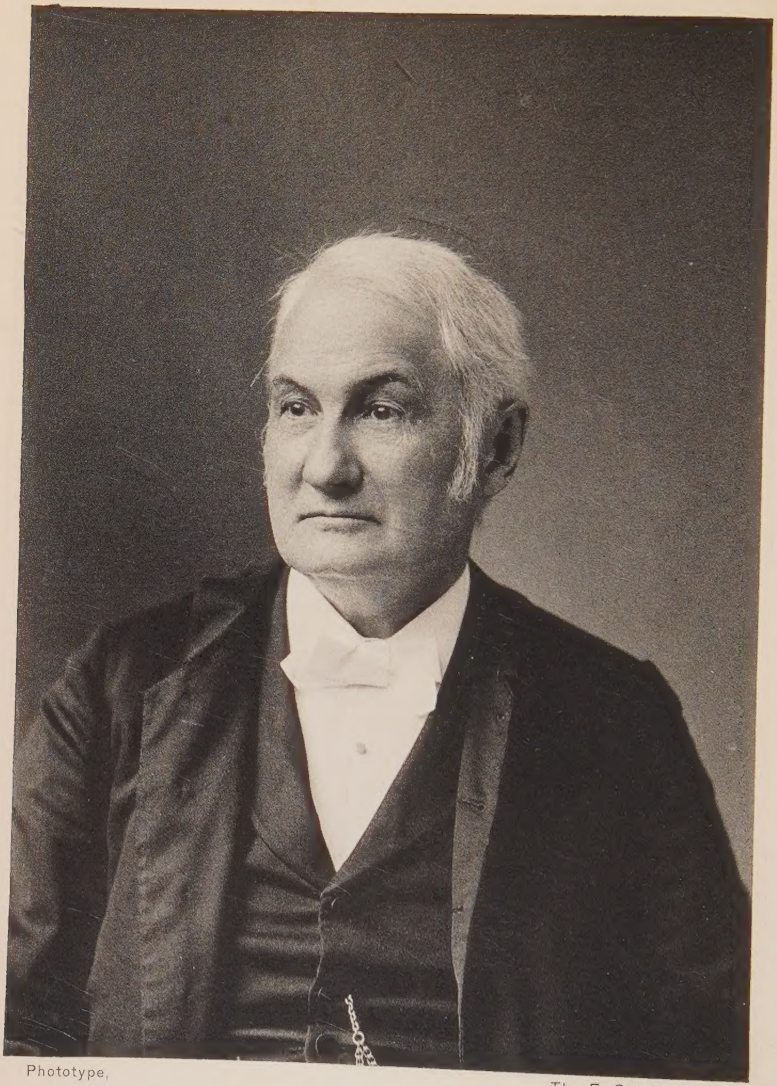

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THE GOSPEL IN ISAIAH

ILLUSTRATED IN A SERIES OF

EXPOSITIONS, TOPICAL AND PRACTICAL

FOUNDED UPON THE SIXTH CHAPTER

BY

CHARLES S. ROBINSON, D. D.,

Pastor of the New York Presbyterian Church,

New York City.

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DEDICATION.

To the People of the New York Presbyterian Church:

I dedicate this volume of Discourses, all of which were presented in the usual form and habit of my pulpit work during the Autumn of the year 1895, to you as a sort of memorial of the times, perhaps a little more trying that season than we should like publicly to own, and stirred with many agitating experiences which we shall, most likely, be somewhat long in forgetting.

This is a troublous world. But its vexations will always be met with better courage and comfort from the evangelical side of the creed of doctrine. God's love lies clearest in the scheme of salvation. It shows itself out on the grass, beside the still waters of grace, white as the hoar-frost, but warm and sweet as the manna which symbolized it. Men and women and children will be happiest when they begin to feel a measure of certainty that their souls can be saved, and will be saved, the moment they believe in the atonement of which a live coal from the altar of sacrifice is the token. In this short chapter of thirteen

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verses the entire plan of redemption is to be found at one glance of the inquirer's eye. What I have tried to do is to exhibit it for you whom I have known and loved and served for these years.

CHAS. S. ROBINSON,

No. 10 East 130th Street, New York.

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CHAPTER I.

THE YEAR KING UZZIAH DIED.

"In the year that king Uzziah died."—*Isaiah vi: 1.*

It is related that, when at last Augustine became a genuine Christian, he asked Ambrose which of the sacred books he should begin first to study, and the answer he received was, " The prophecies of Isaiah." Surely, if any one now should leave the New Testament for the Old, the writings of the " evangelic prophet " would be the best gospel to choose.

Now, it so happens that there is one passage in the book which is called by the name of this most remarkable man, somewhat extensive for use in quotation, which yet has been transferred, almost unchanged, on six different occasions, by different writers in the New Testament. It is credited to Isaiah without any question, and it is distinctly stated that the prophet spake concerning Jesus Christ. That passage is to be found in a single chapter of thirteen verses; and it is not extravagant to say that the entire revelation of God's plan of redemption is contained in it, from the first disclosure of human sin to the last awakening and final ingathering of the nations. It treats of penitence and pardon; of conflict and conviction; of sacrificial atonement and a free offer of grace to every human soul. Moreover, this matchless division of the

inspired Word exhibits the whole Trinity of Persons presented in the doctrine of the Godhead at their official work together, bringing home the sons of God to glory. It shows the seraphim, waving their sixfold wings and singing the original *Trisagion*. It records an authentic decree establishing the ministry as an organism for evangelizing the fallen world. It gives an awful warning concerning the hardening power of a rejected gospel, and the devastations of a disobedient race that will not come and ask to be saved. And it ends with one great, sweet, singing blast of a silver trumpet, which sounds aloud an enduring promise that God will reconstruct the world out of remnants.

That chapter must be worth studying by itself; it is the noblest revelation of God to be found in the Old Testament. And it is that we now propose to take up for our exposition: "The Gospel in Isaiah."

It opens with a beautiful description of a vision which the prophet had, the particulars of which he brings forward with full detail:

"In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly."

In one of his philosophic sketches the Count of Stolberg insists that the healthiest periods of history are not those of which we learn the most; and he instances in proof of his remark the twenty or twenty-

five years of the reign of Antoninus Pius in Rome, of which men really know now almost nothing. This man Uzziah ruled in Jerusalem for a far longer period than any other monarch in Jewish annals except the wicked creature Manasseh; but his story is not told at all in the Books of the Kings, and only incidents of it are mentioned in the Chronicles as they happen to touch the biographies of better men than he was himself.

The main purpose of bringing up the history of such an apostate's last year of existence is found in its connection with the evangelical development of the life and character of another man of whom our opinion is higher. Isaiah tells us that he received his eminent vision "in the year that king Uzziah died." This was the year in which the hero Romulus was born, as the famous story relates; and the earliest foundation of Rome, the eternal city, was dated for the world's chronology. Uzziah died, and Isaiah saw his Lord in a throne, in 758 B. C. A slender review of that period, showing a few characteristics of the times, is all we need at present to rehearse as an introduction to our study.

Occasionally, men call each other's attention to the fact that a surprising number of what thoughtful historians would consider unusual events have aggregated themselves upon a single season. It was so the year this king relieved the nation by his death. The period, as one is reading its record, seems weighted with big issues. The clouds are always charged with electricity; but there are storms in which the fluid

seems to rush up in frantic violence against the edge of the masses of mist, there to wait for a passing bulk of vapor just to come and touch it into lightning and fill the air with a wrathful explosion. The day lives on, but is heavy with foreboding; the sky appears unfriendly; so it was during that entire twelvemonth when that king lay dying. And a mere word or two of Isaiah's descriptions will show the plain reason.

For one thing, there was a deadly and deadening influence of utter worldliness through all that period. The nation's financial prosperity and its material increase in wealth had begun to tell upon public virtue. Everything seemed to grow showy and heartless. Nothing a man could tell of occurred from day to day; no striking outbreak could be put up on the walls as a dangerous outburst of crime. People looked as if they were too lazy to be vicious. We have seen days, now and then, in these northern climates of ours, in which the snow turns to be rain, then rain into sleet; and, by and by, the trees are covered with a radiant raiment of ice, every twig, every bough, every shrub; so, as the morning sun comes up, he shines on an orchard of diamonds, a grove of pearls, a forest of pendant crystals, hanging in a world of iridescent beauty. But nobody could live in it. One who shook the branches would shiver, and he who touched them would twinge. Meantime, if a man could only remember it while he admires, he would think the trees were likely to die before they could ease them-

selves from a burden so fatal as it glittered and so freezing as it flashed. It was thus in Israel, "the year that king Uzziah died." Many successes in war, profuse harvests, vast commerce, important conquests, had rendered the realm rich in fact and supercilious in feeling. Over it fell something like that ice-shower; and the luxury congealed as it shone. What good can it be to any community to have money and then persistently break the Sabbath?

It was at this time that the men grew vicious, effeminate and idle; and the women interested themselves in clothes. Ladies of social distinction began to bejewel their persons, and to besmirch their lives with a mixed acceptance of foreign religions that had obscene rituals. There was hollowness and insincerity in the tone of public morals; social customs took on tolerations of dress degradation. It remains, as a literary curiosity to this day in the midst of Isaiah's sermons, for modern Christians to read the strange enumeration of female adornments which he makes as he groups together his epithets of stinging derision and contempt. Thus it was that God denounced the whole mass of vanity and paraphernalia of shame which fashion was then wearing in Jerusalem:

"Moreover the Lord saith, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet: * * * in that day the Lord will take away the bravery of their tinkling

ornaments about their feet, and their cauls, and their round tires like the moon, the chains, and the bracelets, and the mufflers, the bonnets, and the ornaments of the legs, and the headbands, and the tablets, and the earrings, the rings, and nose jewels, the changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles, and the wimples, and the crisping pins, the glasses, and the fine linen, and the hoods, and the vails."

Coupled with this worldliness of the people there was found, also, as one of the peculiarities of the " year that king Uzziah died," an element of political confusion. Sixteen years old when he took up that scepter which had been torn violently from his father's hand, this ruler of Israel found his way open to the throne by the assassination of his predecessor. The early part of his reign was prosperous and easier for the people. So his common life was without heinous reproach in most respects. But for the whole formidable period of fifty-two years he was embarrassed by divisions among the nobles, who never forgot that he held the throne only by the election of a stormy faction, guilty of a suspicious crime. The later part of his history was wilful and sullied with undevout perversities; he grew worse as he proceeded, and at the end invaded the priest's office and was punished with leprosy.

The fact is, Uzziah had begun his career rather well, but almost the entire credit of his success belonged to another person. There is evidence all along of the influence of the Prophet Zechariah, the reputed father-

in-law of Ahaz, whose piety for the few years of his early ministry made his death so much to be mourned afterward—evidence of this young preacher's influence in fashioning the king's character. Indeed, the best record of Uzziah's life has been given in two verses:

" And he sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God: and, as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper. But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the Lord his God, and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense."

Evidently this youthful king found force enough in the instructions he received from his faithful tutor to bear him on for several of the opening decades of his administration. But his success began soon to bring him riches, and riches brought pride; and the pride of wealth generally manages to poison an owner's heart with a portion of its own venom. Self-seeking and self-indulgence, haughtiness and arrogance in swift succession after luxuriousness and indolence, followed on in the same train; so it was natural that the king should grow jealous of the priests he suffered to come to the front and wear fine uniforms in august processions. Clothes came into the world when sin did. Babylonish garments have always been found to beguile the faithful. King Uzziah fell from his early loyalty to God, and in his vanity really made himself think he could take in charge men's souls as well as bodies.

Hence, on one notable occasion, he attempted to usurp the office of the sons of Levi. Elated with some triumphs which the favor of God had granted him, the monarch arrayed himself in raiment like a priest, proceeded to the temple, and actually entered in with the bold purpose of burning incense upon the golden altar. There appears to have still remained some little of the old faith, and a good measure of the old violence, of the tribe of Levi in the servitors of the temple who abruptly confronted him. Azariah, the priest, with eighty more of the retinue belonging to his rank in the house of the Lord, valiantly withstood the interloper. These courageous ecclesiastics challenged his right there to perform sacerdotal acts. They used plain words with him. They instantly and peremptorily bade him "go out of the sanctuary." They denounced the king as a "trespasser," and threatened him with the terrible judgments of the Almighty. At the height of the narrative, as one reads the old Chronicle, the scene grows to be exciting and dramatic:

"And they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the Lord, but to the priests, the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither shall it be for thine honor from the Lord God. Then Uzziah was wroth, and had a censer in his hand to burn incense: and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the

priests in the house of the Lord, from beside the incense altar. And Azariah, the chief priest, and all the priests looked upon him, and behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out from thence; yea, himself hasted also to go out, because the Lord had smitten him. And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house, being a leper: for he was cut off from the house of the Lord: and Jotham his son was over the king's house, judging the people of the land."

We might add to this, some traditional particulars which Josephus gathered afterward. There stood the king, thoroughly enraged, with a censer in his hand; there stood the hierarch with fourscore ecclesiastics at his back. History leaves the impression upon one's mind somewhat settled, that priests are not wont to be over tame anyway. These men lifted their hundred and sixty hands in solemn protest unto God.

In this one awful moment of decision and defiance, that historic earthquake occurred which sent a thrill of terror across Jerusalem in an anguish of the world. The walls of the temple shook as the foundations of Mount Moriah rose and fell; the roof cracked; the holy mystery of the shrines within was thrown open to the noonday; the king himself was casting up his eyes toward the heavens, alarmed and humiliated with shame at his sacrilege, when, suddenly, upon his forehead fell a fatal scurf of leprosy, and that awful cry, "Unclean! unclean!" which, from the beginning of levitical law, was the sign, for ever after, of a human

being's exclusion from the homes and haunts of men, arose on the air. From that hour Uzziah was doomed. Judah's king was a leper !

This is enough for our present purpose. Politically, therefore, the nation was in a most melancholy and embarrassing position. The aged invalid was only just alive; it was worse for the people than if a lightning stroke had laid him dead; his son was king, yet not king; he could not act sovereignly; there was a divided head. So things went astray, growing worse till the end of " the year that king Uzziah died."

CHAPTER II.

THE SON OF AMOZ.

"I saw also the Lord."—*Isaiah vi: 1.*

If we call this vision of the son of Amoz, his "induction into office," we need not be understood as asserting that such was its single, or even its special, purpose. Before we reach the end of the story, we shall have reason to believe that really the chief aim of the extraordinary experience he passed through at this time was designed to deepen his faith and prepare him for the work he was divinely commissioned to do, and the martyrdom to which he was destined at the last. We have already passed in review the particular period in which he appeared as the most conspicuous of God's representatives in the presence of kings and their people. It is fitting that we should also make some sort of introduction of the man who is to figure in the astonishing spectacle.

It would be interesting for us to know more of Isaiah's personal biography and surroundings when he came forth into his holy calling as a commissioned prophet of God. But his early life is nearly lost in a singular obscurity. Almost all that is recorded of it is set down abruptly in the first verse of the prophetic book which bears his name: "The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Je-

rusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah."

The name "Isaiah" means "Jehovah's salvation." These old family appellations are always full of significance, and sometimes of pathetic suggestion. For we think of some devout parents who gave this newborn child to God in permanent consecration. Isaiah himself showed in his family life afterward that his name and his children's had force: "Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me, are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts."

The lineage of this prophet has been so clouded with foolish traditions that not much concerning it can be trusted; if the rabbins are to be believed, he was of royal blood, the cousin of King Uzziah. His father, Amoz, was declared to be the younger son of King Jehoash. But it does not matter how one is born or related, here in such a world of sounding titles as ours is; it matters only that one should be a child of God. Isaiah was no better for being a king's son; no worse for being the son of one bad king or the grandson of another good one; favor with God settles usefulness, and that depends on how a man behaves.

The home of Isaiah was in Jerusalem, and his residence could not have been far from the temple. Hence he was reared in the very atmosphere of the court and the capital. This may account somewhat for the deferential dignity of his manners, so manifest in all his dealings in public with the highest ambassadors who sought him for counsel and aid in their extremity.

Consorting with princes, he seems to have a touch of royal benignity in his mien, an air and demeanor of his own. It is refreshing to see how, in the Scripture annals, he walks like the absolute equal of monarchs; and when the voice of Jehovah sounds through Isaiah's speech, this man towers erect and masterful over them all.

The household of this prophet figures in rather a characteristic companionship. Isaiah was a married man, and among his neighbors that wife of his was considered a remarkable woman. They called her by the exalted name of "The Prophetess." It is fair to think that she really possessed a spirit akin to his own; indeed the best expositors tell us that the term applied to this godly woman can not signify less than her being endowed with the gift of prophecy. We love to imagine those two people together. Some of the prophets were untaught and perhaps measurably illiterate; but Isaiah was an educated scholar, a writer of of the rarest gifts, in poetry and dramatic oratory almost unrivaled in literary merit as it comes to us in the Old Testament. Perhaps this helpful woman aided him in transcription or gathering his materials for so voluminous a compilation as his "Acts of Uzziah," which the Chronicles mention, required. There were two apochryphal books, besides this, that find a notice along the years, the one called "The Ascension," and the other, "The Apocalypse." These have disappeared, but even the reputation they show is valuable. The "Prophecies" by themselves are enough

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for any mere mortal's fame. The family life was full of cheer to him, and the picture of the household grows on our imagination by reason of the intense and persistent spirit of evangelism which pervades it.

Isaiah had these two children, to whom allusion has been made. A name was given to each so quaint and peculiar that it has outlived all the rest of their biography; no mention is found of their after history or exploits. One was called "*Shear-jashub:*" an entire Hebrew sentence in itself—"a remnant shall return." The other was called "*Ma-her-shalal-hash-baz:*" another whole sentence—"haste, spoil, speed to the prey." These Isaiah wrote "with a man's pen" upon "a great roll," and then summoned two "faithful witnesses to record" what he had done, putting the inscription in a conspicuous place near the roadway to the temple, so that it might testify to each passer-by concerning its significance. He took the "prophetess" into counsel with him, so that it should have her spirit of inspiration as well as his own, and become a family proclamation and last as a monument of God's faithfulness while the boys should live. Thus this wife of the seer gains her rank among those anonymous missionaries of God to men, like the "woman of Tekoa," or the "old prophet" at Bethel, who, nameless themselves, made their testimonies to win a name in the Scripture for the glory of God.

The real meaning of those names was meant for a sign of God's amazing grace to wilful and sinning sons of Judah. One bore reference to the awful judgments

that had been denounced upon the nation for its sins; the other, to the promise of restoration and peace, to that penitent remainder of the tribes who should come in obedience to new faith, which had been linked with it. While Isaiah and his wife and his boys said warningly, "Destruction is speeding to the spoil, and ruin is now hasting to its prey," they kept saying also, "Yet a remnant shall come back again, a remnant of Jacob shall return, by and by, unto the covenant-keeping God!" The boys were saying that every time their parents called them by their long names. The most noticeable peculiarity disclosed in this period of family prophecy is the reiteration of predictions concerning the coming of Jesus Christ: three distinct prophecies spring up out of this portion of history, like blossoms out of a burial ground, the more beautiful because so unexpected. And one of these is that about the birth of the Child whose name should be "Immanuel."

The extent of Isaiah's prophetic life stretches across a turbulent series of years from 758 to 698 B. C. He labored as God's ambassador in the administration of four kings, and in this he was obliged to join the carefulness of a diplomat with the courage of a minister-plenipotentiary sent by the court of the High and Holy One of Israel.

Really these are all of the facts which we can gather concerning the personal life of this most remarkable seer. But legend has undertaken to supply any amount of deficiency. We need not trust the

frivolous tales of the Talmudists; but when one remembers the supernatural excellence of Isaiah's information, and the matchless sublimity of his visions, we can easily see why they tried so hard to account for them.

It is related that once, while Isaiah was speaking to king Hezekiah, his voice was suddenly arrested, and he was carried swiftly away in spirit by an angel. He traversed the firmament overhead, where his soul saw the strife of the seraphs and demons, waged in the space outspread between the earth and the moon. He entered the six heavens and admired their glory. Then he penetrated also into the seventh heaven, where he caught a glimpse of the three Holy Persons of the Godhead. A mysterious hand opened the books of the future to his inspection. Not the least necessity is laid upon us that we credit even the small part of this wild and foolish story. It is valuable only as showing clearly how the popular passion sought for extraordinary explanation of the supremacy which Isaiah held among the commissioned prophets of Jehovah.

Thus, then, Isaiah goes forth with his wife and the two boys for his life's work; what think you of the picture? They are all in it or all at it; the whole family are in the business for good. What is the record of you or me, to whom the "Gospel in Isaiah" is going? Is there any better purpose, any higher experience, in your history or in mine? If you or I were to be martyred for the sake of Jesus and his covenant,

would not the world wonder what such tame people had done to merit it?

It makes a great difference as to the message one is to bear out into the hostilities of this age in which we live, whether we shall be constrained to become pusillanimous or cowardly. Why can not we all be brave and yet be gentle? Why can not a Christian grow patient and even charitable in the very midst of the wicked who traduce him? Can not an intelligent student of the New Testiment see that the apostle's teaching has in the worst of times been true? "Where sin abounded," so Isaiah preached, just as persistently as Paul wrote, "grace did much more abound." God hates sin; but God does not desire the death of any sinner; he would rather that all the wicked would turn unto him and live. And we are to catch the same spirit. It is not for us to break a reed which has been already bruised, nor to quench a wisp of flax because a spark, just a spark, has started it to smoke with the feeblest flame.

Isaiah says he "saw the Lord;" that was what gave him his invincible strength. He knew that right would prosper in the end, and that wrong must necessarily go to the wall. Such a conception of the final nature of things has been what has filled the souls of chieftains ever since the world began to recognize patriotism and valor and knighthood in the hearts of its heroes, "Truly, O Athenians!" cried out the eloquent Demosthenes in the ears of his countrymen, "I should regard Philip as a most formidable and over-

whelming adversary, if I beheld him at this moment acting justly. But it is not possible that a power should be permanent which is marked with such unfairness, perjury, and falsehood." This was heathen testimony, I admit. But it has been accepted as wise and true for these years on years. Men with the New Testament in their hands can afford to go forth against any evil, and stand quietly trusting the Almighty and All-wise to bring them victory at last.

Suffer me, in closing this exposition, to quote a mere fragment of poetry that you may catch its forcible figure in the lesson you learn.

> "How will you know the pitch of that great bell,
> Too large for you to stir?—Let but a flute
> Play 'neath the fine-mixed metal: listen close
> Till the right note flows forth, a silvery rill:
> Then shall the huge bell tremble;—then the mass,
> With myriad waves concurrent, shall respond
> In low soft unison."

Come with me, my friend, and, with a fine imagination, under the dome of a great life like that of this old prophet-son of Amoz. Play the best you can the one clear flute-note of your Christian life, the one supreme excellence of your highest devotion to the Lord who bought you with his blood. Look straight upward into the bell of Isaiah's amazing life of labor and sacrifice; play the note once more strong and vibrant against the metal. See if there be any response from your noblest word or deed answering forth

from his! Does your courage appear to ring in a bravery like that aged martyr's? Does your tenderness in behalf of souls seem to sing in unison with his when he died for them?

CHAPTER III.

THE VISION OF CHRIST ENTHRONED.

"The Lord, sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up." *Isaiah vi: 1.*

In the chapter which records the commencement of Isaiah's ministry we find the entire gospel scheme detailed as belonging to his individual experience. For he had a notable vision, in which he saw Jehovah, Christ, the Son of God, exalted in the enjoyment of his glory; then, in swift succession, the same being in the execution of his work, in the exercise of his authority, and finally in the sovereign distribution of his grace.

We shall mistake much, if we suppose this experience anything more or less than absolutely real to Isaiah's conception. It was not a mere fantasy, nor the strange picture of a distempered imagination. It must have been a fact; the prophet actually witnessed the scenes he described. We are to think of him as standing one day out in front of the Temple at Jerusalem, at no great distance from the chief altar of sacrifice. Some will remember enough about the general arrangement of the courts and apartments which were included in this sacred inclosure to understand that, to an observer, placed directly before the main edifice, the whole interior of the sanctuary would be

disclosed if only the doors were suddenly opened, and the veil across the Holy of Holies withdrawn. Chiefly, the sight would now be that of the architecture, the splendid facade of the building which the Jews were wont to call " the noblest fabric under the sun."

Possibly, Isaiah was brooding over the changed times since those blessed days when the fathers brought their willing gifts, and yet more willing prayers to this house of worship; when Jehovah vouchsafed his glorious presence, gleaming forth upon the mercy seat. As he looked and thought and remembered and mourned, he was abruptly startled by the coming of a vast surprise.

In a flash, suddenly, all the scene appeared to be changed and changing around him. There still stood the sacred edifice, but it had mysteriously become transparent. He could look positively clear through it; at any rate, he could see far into it, and through its curtains and portals and partitions, as plainly as if everything had been formed of crystal. And there, in the very place of the ancient Shekinah, within the innermost shrine of the Holy of Holies, shone a grand vision of God.

1. This august spectacle now claims our careful attention. Isaiah describes the scene in terms appropriate to the splendor of a monarch: " In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple." He tells us concerning the seat he was raised upon, the attendants who surrounded him, the

anthem they were chanting, and the mighty majesty which shook the audience room where he sat in an indescribable dignity and state. It will help us to notice the language which he here employs in his enthusiastic description.

1. This kingly Personage is represented with his regal honors all upon him; and a scene is suddenly thrown before our imaginations like that of an oriental palace pompously flung open in the pageantry of holding audience. It is remarkable, however, that Isaiah offers no description of the Monarch himself. Evidently this prophet shrinks from relating those particulars, whatever they may have been, by which the personal figure of the Almighty was suggested to him so that he knew it. He does not even make use of the name which was given in the first chapter of Genesis as that of God the Creator; nor does he use the name given in Exodus as Israel's covenant God. It is worth our while to notice that here the word "Lord" is not printed in the small capital letters, by which the venerable translators were accustomed to signify that in the original language the name was Jehovah; in this instance the name in the Hebrew is not Jehovah; it is that which is used when Abraham prayed for Sodom, and when Samson's father pleaded for wisdom in training his child; it is the word which lent its vowels to the unpronounceable letters of God's highest name, Jehovah; but it is not Jehovah, and so it gives us no information.

2. But now the prophet speaks of the throne and

the King he sees in it, and we begin to think of other visions of our Maker that are on record. We shall be helped by a comparison between them. This throne is said to have been "high and lifted up," to show God's supremacy of great exaltation. The symbols are chosen which, among the orientals, would be considered significant of the loftiest style and the most brilliant magnificence. Turning our eyes over the various books of the Bible, we reach the last one, and there we find the evangelist John, in the Isle of Patmos, writing thus:

"After this I looked, and behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard, was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter. And immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne; and he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne in sight like unto an emerald."

Something, almost matchless in sublimity, there is in this spectacle; but it lacks in clearness of particulars, which he gives afterward, when he is granted a fresh disclosure of the Deity:

"And I turned to see the voice which spake with me. And having turned I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the candlesticks one like unto a son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle. And his head and his hair were white as white

wool, white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto burnished brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace; and his voice as the voice of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as one dead."

The mention of a snowy whiteness here sends us back to the similar sight, vouchsafed to Daniel, six hundred years before this: "I beheld till thrones were placed, and one that was ancient of days did sit: his raiment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and the wheels thereof burning fire. I saw in the night visions, and, behold, there came with the clouds of heaven one like unto a son of man, and he came even to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."

In all these visions of God there are observable the same forms of description as to general details; in each instance the seer mentions enough to show that the Almighty was visible in figure, with the ordinary features and members of a human being; this Ezekiel intensifies by the direct statement of some resemblances which he noticed while he was looking upon

the living creatures and wheels, with the cloud infolding fire, by the river Chebar:

"As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake. And I saw as the color of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about. And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it."

It is enough for us just now that we hold in mind the wonderful and glorious beauty of these strange spectacles, seen by the inspired servants of the Highest, and remember that they all have the shape of a man, the semblance of a throne, the brightness around it, the whole grandeur and state of a supreme Monarch.

It can not be denied that the vision which the prophet had of God in the throne—Christ, the son of God, as we now know—is more alarming than attractive, when considered simply by itself. For it looks to us like the picture of an oriental sovereign, despotic and severe, a solitary eastern autocrat in some grand

pageantry of display. So it does not commend itself to a human sympathy of welcome in any tried heart, nor seem calculated to win an affectionate trust. We shall have to wait in our estimate, however, until we discover the manifestation of grace which comes from this arbiter of the souls of men. This is the Lord Jesus Christ, to be sure; but it is the Lamb of God in his attitude as the Lion of Judah: "Behold, therefore, the goodness and severity of God." Here it seems as if the severity came in advance of the goodness. There is a sort of Christian instinct which fashions an apology for such devout people as are wont to interpolate their own words in repeating the declaration of the apostle, and say: "Our God, (out of Christ), is a consuming fire."

Hence we are to understand that this scene in the temple was far more than a mere sight of a picture, far more than a mere spectacle of rolling clouds and singing seraphim. To Isaiah it must have been, even in that early dawn of prophecy, the revelation of the coming glory that the Messiah was to receive. This will appear more and more clearly, as one moves forward in the study of the entire chapter. Called away now from earthly thoughts and sights, this seer found himself face to face with the eternal verities of Christ's kingdom, and the divine splendors of God's only-begotten Son.

Grace is always to be expected beforehand, when one is set apart for a difficult duty. It seems to have been part of their preparatory discipline in all cases,

whenever God's greatest servants have been openly dispatched upon public errands, that they should meet at the very outset of their official career some special manifestation of God's awful presence, some phenomenal disclosure of a terrible Deity, which should impress their minds and fill their souls with a profound dread. They should be made to feel their positive sinfulness, their exposures on every hand to the attacks of the adversary, their own interior corruption of heart, their utter dependence upon divine mercy for any moment of forbearance from the wrath already due for their wickedness.

Moses beheld his vision of God in the burning bush; Joshua stood confronted by the startling spectacle of an Armed Man, announcing himself to be the Captain of the Lord's host; Samuel was summoned, thrice in one night, by a mysterious Voice out from among the curtains of the tabernacle at Shiloh; high over him in the opened heavens, Saul of Tarsus saw Jesus face to face, as he was riding defiantly to Damascus; it was thus he gained his commission to be the most distinguished apostle.

So here, when Isaiah was summoned into a public ministry which a life of toil must discharge at the cost of many a sad hour of perilous exposure, and finally to seal with suffering and blood down in the awful ravine of En-rogel, he was prepared for his heavy commission by an unparalleled disclosure of Jehovah, enthroned in the sanctuary at Jerusalem. It is not likely that God will ever offer to any one of us so mag-

nificent a spectacle as this, no matter what may be our task of endurance or service. But we may be sure of one thing: God will not ever in any case send us on an errand of his own without giving us early whatever grace we shall need in achieving a certain success. We shall be taught his holiness; we shall be shown his magnificent power; in an irresistible way which will force us to become thoughtful and serious, we shall be made to learn what it is to be a servant of the Most High.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HABITATION OF GOD.

"And his train filled the temple."—*Isaiah vi: 1.*

The word " eternity" is found only once in our English Bible. It is not certain whether or not our venerable translators designed it to be so, and reserved so significant a term to so solemn a solitariness, just in order to give it a supreme dignity; the fact that the instance occurs in one of the verses of Isaiah's prophecy, however, helps us in our present study. " Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity." This seems to mean that eternity is the habitation of God. The word is defined " existence outside of the relations of time." Not timelessness, but duration without beginning or end; God occupies this solely and wholly; he resides in it, he fills it with his presence.

The employment of such an expression must indicate that the only living and true God, the Supreme Head of the universe, has never actually purposed to hold himself away utterly from the comprehension that his creatures would expect to cherish of him. He has not revealed before men, all of whom are reared and educated under a system of years, ages, minutes and seasons of measured length, the life of their Creator and Judge, as an ineffable mystery clear outside of

their possibilities of understanding. Rather, we are constrained to believe that he designed to ennoble time by taking it up into his consideration; he is condescending to picture himself as to some extent sharing the ordinary conditions of existence as it flows on for all except himself; that explains the rest of the sublime utterance with which this is connected. He resides, but only in eternity, and " with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit." Grace does not surrender the divine sublimity; it simply uplifts our conception of the divine mercy. Surely, that must be the reason why he adds: " I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth." He is not going to level his " eternity " against his creatures who are but " of yesterday and know nothing."

These considerations give us aid as we return to our study of an intensely figurative passage like this which Isaiah gives us in the opening of his vision of Jehovah in the temple at Jerusalem. We recall his manner of dealing with the throne and the august Personage who was sitting upon it; now he notes the habiliments displayed by the King.

His attention is caught specially by a " train " which he says, in his glowing description, " filled the temple." We understand him to be arrested and wonderstruck by the brilliance and voluminousness of this royal robe; it was rich, extensive, and flowing; to the prophet's rapt imagination the Holy Place appeared quite full of it. There is never in God's temple room for anything but God—for the glory of God—for the

worship of God. When " the Lord is in his holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before him." Much is always made in the Scriptures about what is here called the train of the Almighty. Such a spectacle as this of Isaiah recalls the somewhat similar one vouchsafed to Moses among the mountains of Horeb. He prayed that most daring prayer, " Show me, O Lord, thy glory!" and then there came back to him from the cliffs of purple granite overhead, less, and yet more, than he had asked; Jehovah stooped to grant his petition:

" And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: and it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock; and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: and I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen."

The meaning of this is very plain; all that the favored servant of God could bear was granted to him: he was permitted to catch one parting glimpse of the train of Jehovah's glory as it swept majestically past the opening in the rift of the cleft rock.

As we leave the contemplation of this vision of Isaiah, it is evident that human speech can no further go, in its power of word-painting. The description stands beside that one grandest delineation by Habakkuk, of the march of the infinite Monarch of the whole universe through the length and breadth of his realm.

" God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. And his brightness was as the light ; he had horns coming out of his hand ; and there was the hiding of his power. Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet. He stood, and measured the earth : he beheld, and drove asunder the nations ; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow : his ways are everlasting."

What is needed now is an interpretation of this scene as it appeared to Isaiah. Serious questions arise in our minds.

1. Of course, the earliest of them all would be this : Who was that Personage seen by the prophet, the King on the throne ?

Our answer would come at once and clearly, only here we recollect how often it has been reiterated : " No man hath seen God at any time." But still, we also remember that Jacob once said, " I have seen God face to face." And the promise has been given in terms too glad and explicit for any to misunderstand : " Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

These passages are not inconsistent ; they can be reconciled without difficulty by limiting the prohibition to the actual essence, or inherent personality, of our Father in heaven. Mortal eyes can not abide the ineffable brilliance of that Presence before which angels veil their faces ; but if God puts on a visible Form, or

takes a Shape we can recognize, we can certainly open our eyes to gaze on what he moderately shows us. Here now, Isaiah declares he looked and saw "the Lord" sitting enthroned. And then a chorus of seraphim began also to chant: "Holy is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" And afterward the prophet says: "Mine eyes have seen the Lord of Hosts."

Hence, it is plain that the wondering man beheld some mysteriously glorious Shape or Semblance, by which the infinite Jehovah vouchsafed to disclose himself on that occasion. He need not be understood as claiming that he saw the very Being of God, only the Manifestation of God. A hint of explanation comes out of the extraordinary expression used by the prophet Ezekiel, in the verse already quoted. He, too, had a vision of the divine radiance of splendor; he saw the seraphim, as Isaiah did, and the brightness shining between them as the symbol of Deity. But, as he begins to describe that spectacle, he does not say he beheld a throne, but the "likeness of a throne;" he does not say he beheld God in the person of a man, but the "appearance of a man." "And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it."

Still, our question remains: Who was the Person that Isaiah beheld and called "the Lord of Hosts"? Conjecture would run out wildly into folly, if we gave it

even slightest indulgence. And it so happens that all surmise or venture at guessing is unnecessary. For the New Testament informs us in plain terms who it was. Here is another of those welcome instances in which we find the Scriptures aiding us in their own interpretation. For in the twelfth chapter of John's gospel, that evangelist quotes the very words of this immediate passage, and applies them without hesitation to our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. Lest any possibility of misapprehension should be left, he adds to an exact rehearsal of a few particulars, an assertion of categorical fact in these remarkable words: "These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him."

That is to say, wonderful as it may appear, it was the Divine Saviour of men, the Messiah of the Jews, the Christ of God, the Second Person in the adorable Godhead, afterward made manifest in the flesh, who was then seen by Isaiah in the throne of his vision. So the Old and the New Testaments—like those two singing seraphim themselves — utter a responsive recognition of the actual Deity of Immanuel our Lord, over the centuries and across the ages. No man hath seen God at any time—that is, the invisible Father—but Isaiah saw the Son, and Abraham saw him, and Hagar saw him, and Israel wrestled with him for a blessing.

2. Now what is the teaching of this whole scene? What is the significance it had to Isaiah? What is its meaning to us?

It makes known to us the majesty of Christ's kingly state. Isaiah was made to see the vision so that he might be cast down, that he might be lifted up, emptied of self and filled with God. When that temple had been first opened, Solomon, with outstretched hands, had said, with a prayer, which seemed more like a psalm: "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all."

That was the kingdom which David had sung before the temple had been builded, when the tabernacle had sheltered the mercy-seat:

"His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed. Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen, and Amen."

And now suddenly men learn that this is the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. Through and through this matchless vision of the prophet, they seem to see the millennial splendors of the crucified Priest, now become the crowned and glorified King in Zion.

To the Christians, under the New Testament, therefore, the spectacle upon which we have been gazing is the one great and glorious hope of the church. "Christ executeth the office of a king in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies."

Our divine Master has given us, in the promise of the gospel, and even repeated in the revelation of the apocalypse, the same proof of trust. "And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." I do not think we can explain just yet what this means; it is a difficult thing to understand how even God's own chosen men can become invested with judicial powers, and sit with Jesus Christ to pronounce judgment on believers and unbelievers at the last. But there can not be in it less of significance than this; those who, in the days of his adversity, follow and serve such a Monarch may expect to be recognized and honored in the days of his exaltation, when he shall come to rule and dwell among his own.

It is always the mark of a prudent man to see his chances when they are offered him. Over the outside portal of the temple in Delphos was written the motto: "Know thy opportunities." It is better to enlist

under the banner of Immanuel now. There are fine disclosures on ahead of us; the kingdom is coming soon.

CHAPTER V.

THE SINGING SERAPHIM.

"Above it stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly."—*Isaiah vi: 2.*

As we return to this inspired description of Isaiah's vision, we find the prophet still gazing upon the awful spectacle. But he exhibits no especial signs of fright as yet. He remains cool and self-possessed enough to note the new and strange forms presented by the ranks of attendants doing service beside the august Personage he saw sitting upon the throne. In general, they appeared to be angels; but he speaks of them as "seraphim," a name that, perhaps, seems familiar to us, when we sing or read the primitive liturgies, but which we are always to be careful to remember occurs now for the first and last and only time in the Bible. These seraphim rank as having the highest dignity in heaven. In their position and in their attitude they shine supreme.

"In the year that King Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly."

The word "seraphim" means fire-bearers or burning ones. It pictures to our imagination a certain flashing, scintillating radiance of intense splendor. These living creatures were glowing with light. It needs that we deeply consider their posture also; they had three pairs of pinions; each seraph with two of them covered his face, with two of them covered his feet; and with the remaining two he silently supported himself upon the throne-light around the king. Or perhaps each kept these in reserve, spread for errands of obedient and rapid flight in case quick command should come. An attitude so sober and quiet was indicative of deepest reverence in the hearts of those who stood there abashed and worshipful.

We can not be exactly certain what force is to be attached to this word "stood." The brilliant and airy character of this spectacle inevitably suggests that these seraphim were hovering rather than stiffly standing in a posture fixed and statuesque. The word here rendered "feet" is elsewhere in the Old Testament applied to the whole lower portion of the body; it is thus that the four wings were employed, simply in concealing the forms of the beings who wielded the other two, in radiant doing of God's service. And this is significant of our ignorance, too; for we really do not know at all what these seraphim were; we have often sung about them in the *Te Deum*, and often talked about them in our prayers, in the presence of each other, till, in the traditions of the church, we fondly think ourselves acquainted quite as well with

them as with any other of the angels of God. Yet, how could we expect to understand much about beings who appear before human vision only once in all history, and then are modestly "covered" with their own wings from faces to feet?

Much labor of commentators has been expended in an effort to identify the seraphim with the cherubim. It is difficult to see how anything would be gained by this; for the cherubim seem to have their own mysteries and reserves also; and the study of their characteristics is complicated by the use of some general fashions of their appearance and figure in the golden adornment of the mercy-seat in the tabernacle and the temple. The Shekinah light is said to have shone, on the ark of the covenant, between two forms of symbolic construction called "the cherubim." Still, the office of such heavenly servitors may, possibly, receive some illustration from a comparison or a contrast between these classes of beings. We have long been accustomed to use a hymn which is constructed on this theme; we think we understand its meaning; there appears nothing strange in these new names.

"Holy, holy, holy! all the saints adore thee,
Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea:
Cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,
Which wert, and art, and evermore shalt be."

Now, are we ready to say that these are the same order and rank of angels, the cherubim and the seraphim—the same beings?

Still, we have to admit that they are represented as making the same ascription of holiness to God, and singing exactly the same song. It does not seem wise to attempt to paraphrase the Scriptures on such a point; and perhaps you will be willing to rehearse what is written in the Old Testament and the New.

We will begin with the vision which John had of a throne and the worshiping assembly around it in heaven; and for the sake of some literary felicities in the modern phraseology we will employ the translation furnished us in the new revision. There the evangelist says: " And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, having seven horns, and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth. And round about the throne were four and twenty thrones: and upon the thrones I saw four and twenty elders sitting, arrayed in white garments; and on their heads crowns of gold. And out of the throne proceed lightnings and voices and thunders. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God; and before the throne, as it were a glassy sea like unto crystal; and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, four living creatures full of eyes before and behind. And the first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face as of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, having each one of them

six wings, are full of eyes round about and within: and they have no rest day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, which was and which is and which is to come."

Concerning all this, we need only remark now that the "four living creatures" mentioned here, called very unfortunately in the former version "four beasts," seem to be cherubim rather than seraphim. When we quote what is added in description, there can be no doubt about the identity they exhibit with those symbolic beings which Ezekiel depicts in the vision he saw by the river Chebar. It is as well now as at any time to bring all the particulars into examination and note the changes and differences in the several accounts. Ezekiel was then grouped with the melancholy captives of Israel who hung their harps upon those historic willows of which the psalmist sang. He saw this marvelous vision of a whirlwind, and then a cloud, and then a fire infolded in it:

"And out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance; they had the likeness of a man. And every one had four faces; and every one of them had four wings. And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot; and they sparkled like the color of burnished brass. And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings thus; their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went every

one straight forward. As for the likeness of their faces, they had the face of a man; and they four had the face of a lion on the right side; and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four had also the face of an eagle. And their faces and their wings were separate above; two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies. And they went every one straight forward; whither the spirit was to go, they went; they turned not when they went. As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches; it went up and down among the living creatures: and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning."

There were four of these cherubim; the same number that John in the Revelation saw; but the number of the singing seraphim that Isaiah beheld is not given. In general appearance the witnesses agree that these heavenly beings all wore the form of a man. But those which John and Ezekiel describe had four faces, while the seraphim do not seem to have had but one. The cherubim had four wings, as Ezekiel records, six as John reckoned; the seraphim, as we recollect, had six. The seraphim covered up their feet with their wings; but the cherubim disclosed theirs, which Ezekiel noticed were "straight feet." He goes so far as to insist that the very soles of their feet were like feet of calves and were sparkling, as if

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of the color of burnished brass. But the chief characteristic of the cherubim was their swift and even noisy movement; the rushing of their wings was such that it filled the whole court, as if it were the voice of God. Moreover, these creatures were full of eyes—their backs, and their hands, and their wings; and they ran and returned, like flashes of lightning. This wonderful activity is quite unlike the quiet attitude of worship preserved by those beings that Isaiah is looking upon, in the vision we are studying just now.

Indeed, there are too many differences in description, as well as in forms of service, for us to attempt to identify such classes of angels as seraphim and cherubim, and call them indiscriminately the same, merely because on certain occasions these inspired seers found they were singing the same song. The name constitutes an argument which requires much force to deny; none of us would be satisfied to think the name had nothing to mean. Our habit of speech really frames, as well as expresses, our best thought on the subject; we never say "cherubic love," but "seraphic love." And we should think it strange to say of the Majesty of God, "he rode upon a seraph, and did fly." That is, it is instinctive for us to speak discriminatingly, and so attribute to the seraphim the finer and more delicate offices of service, and to the cherubim in greater measure, the sterner and in some senses the rougher elements of strength and energy.

It may seem disheartening to conclude just here that this is all we really know about these seraphs,

who share so largely in the vision of Isaiah. But there is likelihood of better advantage, now that we come to the consideration of the attitudes and actions mentioned in the description; spiritual instruction is within our reach of great value in its suggestion.

Did these seraphim stand above the throne of God? Then a lesson may be learned from their humility of demeanor. The depreciation of one's own bright attainments seems to grow according to the actual nearness of his approach to God. These creatures appear to have no consciousness whatsoever of the supreme exaltation of their office, as the glory-clad choristers of Jehovah. If any human being grows pert and supercilious, because of some sudden elevation into conspicuousness, he may well suspect that he has made a mistake in his own spirit, and those of his confidants who have lifted him into notice have made a mistake in summoning him into display with so poor qualifications.

Were the seraphim folding their wings, two over their faces and two over their feet? Then we may learn, again, how the sense of awe appears to increase according to the greater purity of the spirit which claims close companionship with God. We recognize these as the very presence-angels of Jehovah; and we understand why they thus cautiously veil themselves before him; they are afraid of familiarity; they are abashed by the solemnity of the divine holiness. A suitable and decent fear becomes those who worship in the Lord's house. One of the ancient Jewish Tar-

gums gives a most felicitous suggestion: "With two wings each seraph veiled his face that he might not see and with two others he veiled his body in order that he might not be seen."

But now we are told that these seraphim were singing; and, indeed, their song is described to our understanding; it was on the theme of the divine holiness; it was responsive in form and devotional in spirit. The prophet tells us he heard music, and actually caught and remembered the words of the strange anthem: "And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory."

From the structure of this song we infer, that it was a sort of responsive chant. It was intoned by these two chief seraphs, a voice leading in the strain —then a voice answering to it—as was the custom of the ancient Hebrews when singing their psalms in public service, often simply repeating the same note or word. It is impossible to decide how many of these shining choristers were present in this vision, if indeed there were more than the two who are chiefly mentioned; it is likely, however, that all, few or many, took the strain with the leaders, and so accompanied them in such reiterated challenges and appropriate replies. But it was the splendors of the divine holiness which impressed Isaiah the most. Twenty-nine times, in this one book he calls Jehovah "the Holy One of Israel;" a name which occurs only five times elsewhere in the whole Bible. The seraphim's purity, and the

seraphim's song, filled his soul with adoration. Our lesson is perfectly plain; holiness is always the highest theme for an anthem in God's praise; but only holy performers can sing it appropriately. That lip, which can chant the Lord's glory selfishly, looking only for applause—that heart, which pilfers a portion of the Lord's praise lightly, looking for a complimentary congratulation upon an artistic success—that voice, which can roll off the grand notes of the seraphs' Trisagion, and afterward hush, mortified because men's hands have not clapped—that lip, that heart, that voice have not been trained rightly in God's school, where the seraphim learned to utter praises.

Did these shining ones still keep a reserved pair of pinions, free in the air, and extended as if ready for any errands upon which they might be sent or summoned? Then we learn once more, that enjoyment was never intended to interfere with duty. The Tabor of the Transfiguration is close by the country where the Gadarine lunatics need to be healed and comforted. If four wings are ever given to any one of us for ecstasy or spirituality in devotion, we may be certain that two have somewhere been provided also for the prosaic uses of service. Just notice one thing carefully; it is the very seraphim, which are singing the loudest —which are covering their faces abashed, in most reverence—that are yet the beings above all others, who keep their wings waving in the light, as if impatient to share any distant endeavor, the moment that infinite Majesty they adore shall see fit to make them ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GRAND TRISAGION.

"And one cried unto another, and said Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory."

—*Isaiah vi: 3.*

No thoughtful man can read through the graphic account of the prophet, as he describes his vision, without in some measure sharing his awe, and in some degree his apprehension. The very height of our emotion is reached at that moment when the seraph choristers begin the singing of their extraordinary anthem.

I. In the outset, let us look at the form of this song as it appears in the story. For, it may as well be confessed, that at first we are somewhat disappointed in it. It does not really come up to the level of one's conception or demand. It does not appear adapted—or, at any rate, equal—to the occasion.

It consists of only a single sentence, given over and over: "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." Yet the religious world has accepted it in all the ages, and even found a name for it. It is called "The Thrice-Holy;" that is, from the Greek tongue, the "Trisagion."

The trouble is that, as usual, we are too artistic in our taste, and are dwelling too much upon the form,

and are missing the majesty of the sentiment. We notice the poetry and the imagined music more than the thought. We insist on keeping up an excited uniformity in the dramatic particulars of the spectacle. Our expectations were awakened by the ineffable magnificence of the scene; we wish to keep up the splendor in the song.

If we had been called upon beforhand to conceive of just the hymn, which should avail to give utterance fittingly to the laudations of such a king as that on the throne, we should have imagined almost anything else, rather than this. In that eastern land, where all expression easily flows in a current of imagery so brilliant as almost always to be florid, we should instinctively have looked for a glowing display of gorgeous rhetoric. The celestial laureate, on an occasion so princely as is this, would seek from all the four winds his choirs of metaphor, and make them lift their voices in music such as earth never before echoed. That grand anthem would roll through the halls of eternity, rich and glorious, swelling articulate praise!

But all this criticism is wrong; we are quite mistaken in our estimate. It is the unusual theme of the seraphs' song now that gives it its matchless significance; it celebrates the holiness of Jehovah. And it happens that this is the highest attribute reckoned in heaven, and the one least familiar on earth. We learn from the Apocalypse that this is the one peculiar song which the redeemed souls on high keep singing: "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty." No one can fail to

perceive that in an outburst like this—in the cry of those seraphim—the strange vision of Isaiah culminates; the zenith of spiritual emotion is reached in the exact moment when the notes of the music fall on his ear. We cannot avoid the conclusion that the spectacle was given for the sake of the song. For in its ascription of absolute holiness to the holy—thrice-holy—God, is found the final degree of exalted, limitless, inexhaustible excellence, in the whole universe. Praises have to stop there; song can do more. Heavenly harps, with wires of gold, can ring out no loftier notes. For music is exhausted in the serene repetition of an ascription so high and so sacred: "Holy, holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"

II. So much, then, for the sublime song of praise, raised by the seraphim in honor of the Personage Isaiah saw in the extraordinary vision he had in the temple: we come, in the second place, to consider the theme of it—the attribute, which these singers so celebrate: "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts!" And here we need to take up only two questions: why do they select holiness, in particular; and why do they repeat their mention of it three times with such unusual intensity?

1. Of course, in any music, celebrating the praises of an august Sovereign like this, a choice is permitted to the choirs as to what attribute shall be admitted into prominence. And if we could only see, as seraphs see, these elements in the divine character,

ranged in their order of excellence for human recognition, this anthem would appear as it is, the fittest and most wonderful that ever rose on earth or in heaven; for holiness is reckoned at the head of all the acknowledged perfections of God.

For what is holiness? Even the word is significant. The moment we trace it through all the languages where it is earliest brought into use, we find that it always has the same general meaning. In the Greek, it comes from the union of two particles of speech, signifying *deprived of the world;* so it means nothing more nor less than "unearthliness." That is holy which is set apart, and kept apart, from a world full of sin. In the Hebrew, it denotes "set off," or made really distinct. That is holy which is sacredly separated, so as to be never any more of this world. And in the English, as we all know, the word comes immediately, so as hardly to differ, even in the spelling, from the word *wholeness:* holiness is simply wholeness. That is holy which is sound and entire, entirely distinct and away from everything else. The one idea, therefore, running everywhere under this form of speech, is of absolute separation from the earth's defilement, and consecration to heaven's purity; the divine attribute is godliness, the human attribute is God-likeness.

So this question receives its easy answer. These singing seraphim meant Isaiah, and all the world that should afterward read the record of his vision, to know that those who stand the nearest to the divine

presence recognize the best among the divine excellences. That attribute, which the seraphim worship, shall be the only one now brought under our own consideration to-day.

2. But why did these angels sing over the same word three times? Jerome, the old commentator, says, in order to exhibit the doctrine of the Trinity. But then, this does not appear to exhibit that doctrine very clearly, just by itself. That is to say, if such a triple repetition proves a Trinity, it proves it too much for our convenience; for other texts on other subjects push themselves forward awkwardly.—"O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord." The earth is not triune, as we understand it; but it is here addressed three times, in the same form of collocation. Then the other verse in Ezekiel's prophecy:—"I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him." Nobody supposes that revolutions are triune. Just so, that singular admonition Jeremiah presses: "Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, are these." The men of Judah had no thought that their sanctuary or their nation was triune, surely. Still in all these cases we have the three-fold repetition of words.

Nor is there any gain in quoting the Doxology which is in the Revelation, as perhaps suggesting the three-fold division of time into the past, the present, and the future, of disclosure. "And the four

beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come." The division is here; but we do not profess to find it in those three words at the beginning, but in that clause which follows. Eternity of being is superadded to God's holiness of character.

Thus with many other ingenuities of interpretation. More like an analysis or a paraphrase, than an explanation, is the old Chaldee translation of the text; but it is interesting and possibly helpful. It runs thus: "Holy in the highest heavens, the house of his majesty; holy upon the earth, which is the work of his omnipotence; holy for ever, and ever, and ever, is the Lord God of Hosts, almighty, world without end."

Indeed, there does not seem any reason for worrying on in interminable lines of interpretation, offered as the key to the passage we are studying. Scholars tell us that just an ordinary acquaintance with oriental idioms of speech, would show that these languages employ repetitions like this, in order to fasten an impression of intensity and of emphasis. "Holy, Holy, Holy," means—all-holy, perfectly holy. The plainest exposition thus is the safest, and it is the safest because it is the true one. This triple repetition is designed to intimate the absolute excellence—the positive supremacy—of holiness in God.

With this all the parallel Scriptures agree. "Be

ye holy, for I am holy:" this refers to the perfect purity of our Maker, in his whole character: " The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works": in this case, holiness is put forth as an element of his perfect justness in dealing with the children of men. It is likely that, in this ascription which Isaiah heard, the term was intended to describe the transcendently august and venerable majesty of Jehovah, that is, the aggregate of all his harmonious and blended perfections in one perfection of absolute and infinite excellence: thus theologians define it as that essential rectitude of his nature, by which God infinitely delights in his own purity, and in everything agreeable to his will, and by which he has a perfect hatred or abhorrence of everything, which is contrary to it, as an " abominable thing."

Here we must check the discussion for the present. I admit with unaffected humility and regret the insufficiency of any poor words of mine to reproduce either that scene or its impression for ourselves now. But I desire to mention a few suggestions for assistance in our religious life and experience.

1. Among them is this: How weighty it seems to think that we are seen always, and are finally to be judged by a Being so holy as is God ! Yet, men speak tamely about the white throne of the last day, before which their future destiny is to be decided. It is likely that there has never been in our human hearts a proper notion of this attribute which stands first in the infinite perfection of God. Holiness is the very

last one of the elements or qualities of the divine character, that men receive with adequate appreciation. It makes feeblest impression. For power excites our fear, wisdom wins our wonder, justice extorts our admiration, goodness awakens our gratitude, but holiness alone slips out of sight without recognition or creates a measure of dislike in our hearts. It carries with it always in our imagination a rebuke of our sins. God says to men, "Be ye perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect." It will aid in making them holier, if they could be persuaded to bear in their minds how holy God is, and recollect they are always living and acting in his presence. The thoughtful Linnæus wrote up these words over his apartment door: "*Innocui vivite; numen adest:*" Live innocently; God is present.

2. Then comes another lesson: those will be likely to become the firmest and most trustworthy Christians, the beginning of whose religious experience has been fixed and moulded, as if in the very sight of the infinitely holy God. It is not always a happy scene, nor even a welcome one, this disclosure of a perfect God, saying, "Be ye holy; I am holy." Still, it is one of the earliest of all our "homeward steps" to Heaven. Christ was set for the fall of many in Israel before he became to any the hope of rising again. The prostration of the soul comes first.

CHATER VII.

"THE LORD OF HOSTS."

"The Lord of Hosts." *Isaiah vi: 3.*

This new name of Jehovah, we meet for the first time in one of the chapters of the second book of Samuel; it may have been in popular use previous to this, but here is the earliest mention of it in Scripture:

"And David arose, and went with all the people that were with him from the Baale of Judah, to bring up from thence the ark of God, whose name is called by the name of the Lord of hosts that dwelleth between the cherubims."

Afterward it occurs frequently. It is best for us now to seek for an intelligent conception of its meaning; then we can better reach an understanding of the sovereignty it suggests and the comfort it brings.

I. The word translated "hosts" is the common one applied to military armies; it signifies troops of fighting men. The Hebrew term is "Sabaoth." Singularly enough, it does not appear even so much as once in our Old Testament version, although it is used twice in that of the New, once in Paul's Epistle to the Romans, and once in the general Epistle of James. But the first of these is quoted straight from Isaiah by Paul—only the prophet uses the word "hosts" instead of "Sabaoth."

"Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had become as Sodom, and had been made like unto Gomorrah."

We are familiar also with the expression employed in the ancient liturgical anthems: "The Lord God of Sabaoth." It may be necessary to state that there is no connection of this word with the word "Sabbath," none whatsoever. Popular mistake might, perhaps, be excused for confusing such entirely distinct terms, because of so striking a resemblance in sound. But what should one say of the leaders of usage in our English tongue? For it has been noticed that Spenser in poetry, Bacon in philosophy, Scott in romance, and even Johnson in his dictionary, have treated these two words as if exactly the same. "Sabaoth" means hosts but "Sabbath" means rest. They differ every way, in spelling and definition and derivation, and positively nothing is common to both.

But of what "hosts" is it to be understood that Jehovah is Lord? The appellation has in the Scriptures been given to the stars, and all the planetary multitudes of the sky marshaled by the sun and moon. An inspired text can be easily quoted in which it is likewise applied eloquently to the inhabitants of heaven, angels of every degree, principalities and powers. It also is used to include the multitudes of the redeemed; those myriads of saved ones, out of every kindred and clime.

Hence it is not too much to say, that this mere title—"the Lord of Hosts"—places the infinite Jehovah

quite at the head of all races of living things on the earth, or in the air, or under the sea, sovereign of the entire universe. From the atom to the system, from the Eden bird to the apocalyptic angel, from the gnat to the seraph through the spheres of life and glory, he is the one, only, supreme God; he is the King of kings, the Lord of lords, God over all, blessed for ever!

II. Can we not go somewhat further even than this? Is there any method by which we are able to become acquainted with the details of a matchless sovereignty like this so as to know how extensive it is?

Can the stars be numbered? It would seem as if some categorical reply could be given to such a question from the Scripture itself; for the Lord has often spoken about his retinue. It is on record that "the hosts of heaven can not be numbered, neither the sands of the sea measured." Abraham was led out under the open sky and told with a sort of taunting to strive to reckon up their tally. No one can ever fully be impressed with the sublimity of such a challenge until he has himself stood out in the cool midnight upon the plains near Hebron, and turned his eyes aloft on the glittering myriads of the Syrian stars, flashing with a thousand scintillations in the fields of blue overhead. Still, the Lord knows his hosts; "He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names." This is beyond any knowledge we possess. "Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion? Canst thou bring forth Maz-

zaroth in his season or canst thou guide Arcturus with his sons?

Then, next to this, let us ask, can the angels be numbered? The arithmetic of the Bible is one of its supreme mysteries. It is difficult to understand precisely what the sacred writers do really mean by the amazing figures they sometimes cast up. It is likely that in some instances no positive enumeration is attempted. By mere vague show of reckoning in terms of human language the impression is more powerfully produced that no such reckoning can be made. Take this verse for just an example; the numbers mean nothing; it is infinity that is pictured:

"The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels; the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place."

Recall once more the vision of Daniel when he had his sight of heaven:

"A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him; thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the judgment was set, and the books were opened."

There seem to be grades of honor among these heavenly beings; yet none of us can tell what the shining ranks claim as their degrees of loftier exaltation or excellence. But highest above of all sits the Lord: "Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; for by him were all things created, that are in heaven

and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him, and for him."

III. I dwell upon these points the longer, because there are two lessons to be learned from the use of such a title as this we have selected for our study. These are vividly illustrated in the story of Isaiah's vision, and we know all his after history turns upon them.

1. The earliest of them is this; the prophet, for whom this entire spectacle was primarily designed, would never forget how foolishly wicked it must be for any man to attempt to count the almighty Lord of Hosts out of the history of his own world. It is only the fool who can say in his heart, There is no God! An undevout philosopher is mad.

In the course of my reading lately, I met this account of an incident in the life of a once famous infidel. Because of her supreme admiration of Voltaire the Empress Catharine made a collection of books, formerly used by this skeptic, and placed them in the Imperial Library at St. Petersburgh. There they are now, ranged around his statue. In very many of them are found copious marks of his busy pencil along the margin of the pages—annotations in his characteristic handwriting as flitting thoughts came to him in the swift perusal. One in particular is a well-known French work, composed to prove that there can not be any such thing as a Supreme Being in this vast universe. Voltaire penciled the volume through with a

sort of scornful indignation, indicating his spiteful repudiation of so silly a sentiment. It is on the opening leaf of this treatise that the witty philosopher inscribed that apothegm which has so often been quoted, and is drifting down the ages: "If God did not exist," wrote he, "we should have to invent him."

2. The second of these lessons is this: The more intense such an indubitable and irresistible personality in the Godhead, as that clearly disclosed to us in the vision of Isaiah, the more to the advantage, in every particular, is it to those who are under its dominion.

"The whole earth is full of his glory." If Jehovah be the ruler of so many living intelligences, his sway must be limitless, his grace inexhaustible; and in each of these conceptions there is a declaration of supreme value, of him with whom we have to do. Take up into consideration the one attribute of his power, for example: "If God be for us, who can be against us?" In his autobiography, Goethe tells us that the earthquake in Lisbon fairly stumbled his faith and awaked his alarm at the time when he first heard the news of it. The notion of divine reliability fell under his suspicion; how could any one trust a God, who would suffer that seventy thousand people should be overwhelmed by one awful tide of the ocean, rushing up and back as the earth rose in imperious strength of upheaval; where was his goodness? What might he not do next? The young man was frightened at the manifestation of so much almightiness. Later on in life he saw how fine it was to have for his

God a Being who *could* rock the whole world at his will. The idea of a limitless and irresistible power is always alarming, so long as we are not absolutely sure that it is all on our side. Then, the more awful, vehement and inexhaustible the force of omnipotence shows itself to be, the higher is the prizing of it. "The Lord of Hosts is with us," then all this power is ours; "the name of the Lord is a strong tower."

Very beautiful is that little story, told of the Emperor Charles V., when out in one of his military campaigns. On the morning set for the moving of his camp, one of the attendants discovered that a pair of small birds had built their nest among the cords and poles of his tent, just where the rope made a convenient knotting of the hemp. The rough soldiers were going to tear everything away. The monarch bade them in quiet words to leave the whole pavilion standing on the spot until the little ones were fledged. "They trusted me," he remarked, "and I will not disappoint them." That must have been what David meant when he opened his mouth once more to sing of the grace of the Lord of Hosts: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple. For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock."

I can not help attaching some significance to the

fact that God's great name of the Lord of Hosts, used as we have seen only once in the New Testament, is used on that one occasion as an interposition of defense for his own poverty-stricken people against proud oppressors: "Go to now, ye rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and your silver are rusted; and their rust shall be for a testimony against you, and shall eat your flesh as fire. Ye have laid up your treasure in the last days. Behold, the hire of the laborers who mowed your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth out: and the cries of them that reaped have entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth."

Ah, me! there is a preciousness, unspeakable for us troubled and feeble folk, who can not always make headway for ourselves, to discover that a great faithful Friend of ours stands straight behind us, so fierce and fearless, facing our opposers! We may seem utterly deserted; but then we remember that our wrongs cry out for us, when injustice lies heavily on our track; our cries enter into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth!

Let us learn to know God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, by this new name of his. Then we shall often hear him speaking:

"Fear not, for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine; when thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through

the rivers, they shall not overflow thee. For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee. O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold I will lay thy stones with fair colors, and thy foundations with sapphires; and I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones."

So now, in closing, we seek for the main purpose of all this rehearsal. What Isaiah needed his vision for is for us also. Before an Old Testament apostle was stretching a life of toil and trouble. This man understood that his greatest test of strength would come to him in exactly his hour of greatest weakness. If ever his heart should break or his faith falter, then he would want to be sure about the resources of the Lord of Hosts on which he would have to depend. So twice, in an ordinary chapter, this new strange name of Jehovah was put upon his lip to speak. Whenever a child of the Highest is battling with terrors or contending with the legions of the devil, it is full of hope to him to feel that underneath him are the everlasting arms of the Lord of Hosts. Our zeal may be masterful, but our powers are limited. It is recorded in the

the biography of John Wesley, that just before he died he was unable to make his voice heard, although he tried often to say some words of cheer to his faithful friends, whom he was so soon to leave. With a prayer and a will he urged himself into one more mighty effort, and in ringing tones out burst this sentence with all his strength: "The best of all is, God is with us!" And again, raising his hand and waving it in triumph he repeated with a thrilling effect the same cry: "The best of all is, God is with us!" And with that clarion blast of a trumpet, the dauntless soldier of the cross went down into the shadow of death.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HOSTS OF THE LORD.

"The whole earth is full of his glory."—*Isaiah vi: 3.*

Our venerable translators seem to have had some small misgiving as to their accepted rendering of this clause in the song of the seraphim, for they introduced a marginal reference which later scholarship has, with a slight modification, received in place of it. The marginal note is this: " his glory is the fullness of the whole earth." That is to say, God's glory is so great that it fills the entire world. It is in our recent revision, however, changed thus: " the fullness of the whole earth is his glory." That is to say, the fullness of the entire world—that which fills the entire world—is the glory of God.

The representation of the Scriptures, in the Old Testament fully as often as in the New, goes to prove that heaven is near earth, even if it be not in some sense the same. Human life has a recognized home and an intelligent exercise in the habitation where Christ resides beside his Father. Isaiah sees these angels and hears them singing; but while they sing of God's holiness, they sing of the world as filled to its uttermost with his glory at the same moment. Sometimes the phraseology is so intricately collocated that heaven appears as if it really were on earth or as if

the world had become a part of heaven. Thus the hosts of God—angels, principalities, powers, seraphim, cherubim, men, women, children, beasts, birds, fishes, all things which might be called "creatures" together, massed into one aggregate of harmonious, melodious, worshipful existence—are shown before our vision at once. The apostle John may well write about "much people" in his apocalypse. "And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia: Salvation, and glory, and honor, and power, unto the Lord our God."

Let us lay alongside two songs of adoring worship, one as it is recorded in the New Testament, the other as it comes to us in the old: "The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all. Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Bless ye the Lord, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure. Bless the Lord, all his works in all places of his dominion; bless the Lord, O my soul."

Here, mentioned by name, are the "hosts" of the Lord; they are "ministers of his that do his pleasure." Angelic worship is joined with human; the life of heaven admits the presence and praise of a "soul."

Now, let us put with this song of the psalmist that of the revelator, the grand hymn of the ages which John heard in the heavens above: "And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the beasts, and the elders: and the num-

ber of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever."

Here we have the astonishing suggestion that the highest are mating on equal terms with the lowest. The angels are singing the same psalm in the halls of eternity with men and with creatures "under the earth and in the sea." All are ascribing glory and honor to the "Lamb of God."

Nor is that all; add to this another song, somewhat similar, but containing one of the strongest statements in the Bible upon this subject, actually proclaiming that the saints are to be located here upon the planet we inhabit, and that Jesus Christ is to be with them; he is their Prince and Redeemer, and he is to receive their homage for ever.

"And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of saints. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out

of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests; and we shall reign on the earth."

So we learn that celestial life perpetuates all the human peculiarities of this. Heaven is begun below. That other world is bordered closely on to this one, and the souls of men, women and children will continue to stand in the relations of humanity each to each. We shall not be transformed into strangers. The very least that can be made of this most significant expression, " and we shall reign upon the earth," or as the new revision renders it still more strongly, " and they reign upon the earth," is that the inhabitants of heaven, even while singing to the Lamb with the angels, are said to put in their song, as an additional reason for praise, that they are already " a kingdom and priests," and they will dwell upon the earth, where the other " creatures " dwell. Angels appear to be permitted to share in the ascription at the close, for the theme broadens a little so as to take in all the range of worthiness of the Son of God; and then all living things in the skies, in the ground, in the waters, upon the entire earth, take part; and there rises a great swell of choral music, filling eternity with sound. The scene closes with unspeakable grandeur, with the universe on its knees.

" And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshiped him that liveth for ever and ever."

It is exceedingly suggestive to learn that most of

the knowledge we possess concerning the relationship of this world to heaven is communicated in poetry and song. Our warrant for praise in the sanctuary, with the use of instruments and voices, is established in every one of these passages that have been quoted; if it be fitting in heaven to be tuneful in God's praise, why not on the earth the same? It was one of Madame de Stael's comments once, while she was listening to a symphony of highest excellence: "Music has a happy incapacity to express sentiments of any sort that are vile; any artifice; any falsehood." It has to be admitted that no art has ever debased the power of simple tones. Unless the words are corrupt, or the scenery bad, or the temper of the singer vicious, music must always suggest pure and high thoughts. God has given it to men as the only perfectly sinless thing out of heaven, and has kept it in heaven for the use of those who are sinless there.

The same practical lessons come out from this branch of the subject which came from the other. We have dwelt upon some, suggested by the name of the "Lord of Hosts;" we have one fresh matter of consideration as we try to ascertain the majesty and reach of God's kingdom as revealed in these songs of the angels and the redeemed, and it is wonderful in its power of strengthening and encouragement. Can the great hosts of the redeemed be numbered? No, but there are estimates made: "The Lord came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thou-

sands of saints: from his right hand went a fiery law for them." Ten thousand does not seem to be a very large number; but that date is far back in the annals of the race. All of these hints are but tropes of speech. The roll of rhetorical language is intended to declare far more than a mere mention of figures. Recall the words to the Hebrews: "But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect." To one's imagination such a picture is much more significant than mere registering of extensive sums in commonplace enumeration. Once more a splendid flash of apocalyptic vision has been put on the inspired page. "And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel." Those were Jews. So many Israelites, at all events, will be converted to Jesus as the true Messiah, even though their fathers did reject him. "After this I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."

It would seem as if every ingenuity of oratory had

been summoned into employment to produce the impression of magnitude and majesty, as belonging to the hosts of the Lord. The grand occasion chosen for the poetic strain is the marriage of the Messiah to his Bride, the Church: "And I looked, and lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: and they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth." We need not resort to the simplicities of the anagrammatists: multiply the twelve apostles by the twelve tribes of Israel, and you will reach the "one hundred and forty-four;" to which one may put as many ciphers as he pleases for his millions of the Lord's redeemed hosts!

We estimate crowds sometimes by the sounding tumults they raise when they shout, or acclaim, or sing. A fragment of Greek history tells us that, when Xenophon's fatigued army of soldiers caught sight of the Euxin after their terrible march across the burning plains, they gave such an explosive cry of joy, "Thalatta! Thalatta! the sea! the sea!" that birds fell down on the wing. Thus we may judge of mighty numbers and loyal ardor, when the Lord's hosts catch first glimpses of heaven! "And the four and twenty elders

and the four beasts fell down and worshiped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia. And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia; for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints."

Finally, let us note what these considerations of the Almighty's name, as the "Lord of Hosts" have to suggest concerning divine grace.

In not a few minds there lurk some altogether inadequate and belittling conceptions of our Lord Jesus Christ's atonement. It is possible to keep inquiring, "Are there few that be saved?" till our faith shall grow weak, and our courage become cowardice. A promise has been pledged that the world is to be converted to God; which promise is not to be met in any small and niggardly way of gracious fulfillment. You may have seen an old sermon entitled, "The Exceeding Fewness of the Elect"; choosing for its melancholy and inappropriate text this verse: "Yet gleaning-grapes shall be left in it, as the shaking of an olive-tree, two or three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outmost fruitful branches

thereof, saith the LORD God of Israel." No doubt this piece of poetic prophecy had its purpose, and once did a true errand of good; but I can not believe it ever was meant to picture the last judgment. It seems wrong to narrow down such offers of free, full, salvation in this way. Half the human race die before they have attained the age of five years. Certainly entire Christendom believes that infants, who have committed no wilful and intelligent sin, are to be saved. That number by itself makes a mighty beginning; then of the remaining half surely not a small moiety have been redeemed. Is there not a "noble army of martyrs" which we sing about? Has there not been a "goodly fellowship" even of the prophets? If one really set himself to counting all the saints upon the earth, and all who in days gone by have been, and all who are coming in when the nations shall be born in a day, is he going to find the "hosts" so pitifully scarce and thin as to be reckoned by the grapes a gleaner forgets; the olives an overtasked gatherer despises; the three or four berries unreached out upon the tips of the branches? Is it for this that Christ died? Was it for so small a satisfaction that the Lord of Glory endured the travail of his soul? Shall I call this a "gospel" when I preach from such a text?

Surely the Bible is crowded with nobler encouragements. Tell me of the multitudes of the isles that shall be brought unto God; or keep me talking of the "roll-call of the sainted dead" in the muster of the eleventh of Hebrews—those veterans of the cross in a thousand lands:

"Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the seashore innumerable. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."

When we remember the hosts of the sky, and at least imagine concerning the beings we suppose may be inhabiting some of them; when we count up a historic line of saved believers of all classes, from Abraham across to the Dairyman's Daughter, from all climes, from all ages; when we picture the future with its mighty revelations of new revivals, each season bringing fresh glory to God and the Church; when we think of the shining ranks of angels, seraphim and cherubim, such as John in the Apocalypse, and Isaiah in his vision, saw face to face with the King, all heaven populous with living forms of intelligent beauty; oh, when we begin to group these, all these, together, and try to imagine those "many crowns"—Jesus, Son of David, Son of Mary, Son of God—is going eventually to wear, it seems, it does seem, as if he who considers the day, that final day, when the redeemed of the Lord of Hosts shall come home to the heavenly Zion, a day of small things, could not have studied his Bible to profit, and is making a vast and intolerable mistake!

CHAPTER IX.

THE SOUL TREMBLES; THE TEMPLE STANDS.

"And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke."—*Isaiah vi: 4.*

Our study of this spectacle was interrupted just where it became most interesting; and hopefully this insures a brighter welcome for an eager resumption of it now. We left the description of the seraphim's song at the point where it seemed to be having a mysterious effect upon Isaiah himself, and even upon the edifice where he was at the time. The sacred building begins to vibrate in the air, or at least to shiver as if possessed of a sort of frightened life in itself. And at the same moment there comes rolling into the room a great cloud of smoke.

We look in vain through the chapter; the prophet furnishes us no explanation of these phenomena. He puts several things into close association in the story, as if they had some measure of connection with each other. These aid our conjectures, or they would have no value in their utterance. It does not appear likely that any actual motion was produced or communicated to the parts of the temple itself. Nor could we think it possible to introduce with effect such a melodramatic element into the scene. The words here

rendered "the posts of the door," mean the thresholds, the very bottom beams or foundations of the house of God; and it does not command our convictions that they shook palpably; there was no force attacking the edifice inside or outside of it.

It arrests our imagination as more likely that the prophet's own mind was extraordinarily agitated, and a corresponding tremor appeared, perhaps, to vibrate in the vision. He was so moved himself that he imagined the very building around him was going to pieces. Plainly this man was on the verge of breaking down; indeed, in a moment thereafter, as we shall learn by and by, he did break down, forced into the depths of profound conviction of sin; frightened beyond self-control; terror-struck even to crying out aloud in his consternation and dread of mysterious wrath under the rolling clouds: "Woe is me! for I am undone!"

If you picture the scene vividly, you will perceive how all that effect of motion, or semblance of motion, was produced by mere circumstances around him. The radiant light was palpitating upon the golden mercy-seat; the wings of the seraphim were beating in the air; the luminous folds of clouds, flung up by the incense, came floating along into the midst of the mysterious chamber; everything looked tremulous to his disturbed vision, quivering and wavy. It is no wonder that Isaiah was so awe-struck and alarmed that he supposed the solid walls were at the moment going to give way, the very thresholds to be stirred below.

Hence, we are to infer that, just as this moving of the posts of the door was only apparent or phenomenal, really representing the personal experience of Isaiah, rather than the fact of the temple's tremulousness on its foundations, so the smoke which filled the house ought to be understood, not as a literal cloud of supernatural murkiness obscuring the chamber, and enveloping the prophet in alarming gloom, but as a symbol of what was in his own soul at the moment. There was most undoubtedly some smoke arising from the altar where the sacrifice was, from which the seraph's burning coal was taken; but that would not, in any ordinary case, avail to fill so extensive a building. It is clear that we must look for an interpretation of the language to some of the passages outside of this one, where God is represented as disclosing a part of his glorious majesty in order to produce a suitable reverence, and even to create a salutary fear, in the minds of the people. It is easy to bring to recollection several instances at once. Any one sees that this appearance was like that which Moses observed at the time of God's unvailing his presence to the people previous to giving the law: "And Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly."

It will be remembered that a similar manifestation was made subsequent to this, when the tabernacle in the wilderness was solemnly dedicated:

" Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle."

Such clouds are but mists of brightness, hazes of bewildering splendor resembling the folds of clouds, not because they shadow the landscape, but because they blind one's eyes by their brilliance. The loss of an observer's sight comes really from an excess of light; he is not darkened, he is dazzled. So it was when Solomon's temple was consecrated:

" And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord. So that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord."

It is high time, now, that we come to the practical bearing of a theme like this. What is our lesson from the prophet's experience? A very plain answer is at hand. Isaiah received in this vision his commission to God's work; and the vision was rendered awful to him in order that his mind might be thoroughly subdued. Fear came in as an element of his discipline and training. He was made to see that it must be for him, ever thereafter, a perilous, but delightful, a solemn, but animating life to live, now that he had been permanently devoted to the work of saving souls and serving his Maker. And simple as that lesson is, to him or to us, it is the highest and the grandest that

human instruments ever learn. He who stands, as every true Christian does actually stand always, between the living and the dead, has need to be a sober man. The issues of life and eternity hang on his deeds. He may lose a soul by his carelessness, and lose his own by the neglect. His presence with a bad heart may check the chariot of God; his absence in self-seeking indulgence may betray the kingdom of God's grace to Satan in the midst of a battle. Thus all existence grows unutterably grave, until one is fain to cry out in his weakness for the help of his God.

So we see that a Christian is safest when he is almost trembling with fear. But it is his fear that renders him steady. He is, perhaps, afraid of some peril or pain; he is more afraid of some unfaithfulness or sin. When Cadiz was bombarded by the French in 1812, each shell, as it was thrown into the city, was heralded to the inhabitants by a sharp stroke of a bell, just one stroke of a bell; this was the signal for a general caution; every one must be on his guard, for men and women had been torn to pieces by the iron bursting in the streets, and at the open windows, and even under shelter of the dwellings. On one occasion the call was heard, with a singular and strange crash among the chimes in the steeple. The shot had evidently shattered the bell which served to announce its coming. The people looked aloft, and saw the sober monk, whose business it was to give the warning, go quietly up to another bell, and toll out the signal as before; they knew he was afraid; it was because

he was afraid that he was so steady. He was afraid, of course, of cannon-shells in the air so near; but he was more afraid of dereliction in his duty, and the danger that a man might be killed.

It is this sentiment of fear in religion which tests true Christian character to its utmost. It is wild to talk of happy-hearted and careless work for our God amid such risks as these; even impulsive Peter exhorts that we pass the time of our sojourning here in fear.

"Oh, we're sunk enough here, God knows! but not quite so sunk that moments,
Sure, though seldom, are denied us, when the spirit's true endowments
Stand out plainly from its false ones, and apprise it if pursuing,
Or the right way or the wrong way, to its triumph or undoing.
There are flashes struck from midnights, there are fire-flames noondays kindle,
Whereby piled-up honors perish, whereby swollen ambitions dwindle;
While just this or that poor impulse, which for once had play unstifled,
Seems the sole work of a life-time that away the rest has trifled."

Finally, it is needful that we learn from this vision that courage in the labors and endurances of Christian life comes only from the entire prostration of one's soul before the fear of the Lord. We rise to meet the call in perhaps a serene self-confidence; suddenly the very pillars of existence seem to tremble, and a vast bewilderment of alarm and darkness fills our sky with smoke. There is nothing for poor human nature to do except fall on the pavement and cry out for pitying help from above. Then heaven opens, and divine strength arrives.

For he that fears God has really nothing else to fear. He moves forward to great perils and great deeds with a full self-abasement; in dust and ashes at the feet of his Master, but unterrified and unabashed before all the world beside. One of our chief magistrates, leaving his rural home for the journey to the capital of the nation, where this republic was to place him at its head as the President, said to honest citizens who knew him, and loved him, and trembled for him; "I feel my responsibility, but I do not fear it." The sentiment was so simple in its utterance and yet so grand, that they asked him to put it into the inaugural address he should have to make when he took his oath of high office. And there it appears, a motto for every statesman who assumes heavy cares, and advances to face perilous duties, in the fear of God.

"In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence:" so wrote for his proverb the wisest man in the world. Heroes are made out of men whose fear is supreme. Grand old Chrysostom erected his form against shocks of tempestuous attack, and cried out: "Jezebel is raising her persecution, and Elijah must fly; Herodias is wantoning in pleasure, and John must be bound in chains: the Egyptian wife tells her lie, and innocent Joseph must be cast into prison. And so if they banish me, I shall be like Elijah; if they throw me into the dungeon, like Jeremiah; if they plunge me into the sea, like the prophet Jonah; if into the lion's pit, like Daniel; if they stone me, it is Stephen I shall resemble; or John the forerunner, if they cut off my head;

Paul, if they beat me with an over-measure of stripes; Isaiah, if they saw me asunder." But none of these alarms moved so old a soldier of the cross as he. For he remembered only the words of the Master in whose footsteps he was treading: "And I say unto you, my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that, have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him."

CHAPTER X.

FEAR AS A PREPARATION FOR DUTY.

"Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone."—*Isaiah vi: 5.*

The prophet seems to have kept gazing upon that awful Form of God seated on a throne within the mysterious recess of the Holy of Holies. Around it were the seraphim, waving wings of flame, singing a responsive song: "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" At this point in the disclosure, the brave Isaiah was thoroughly subdued. And even as with rapt spirit he held his eyes upon the scene, the foundations of the edifice appeared to move and an inexplicable cloud of incense came rolling into the room. This proved too much for his endurance; he fell on his face in the depths of positive despair; he cried out piteously, "Woe is me! for I am undone!"

It behooves us, now as we advance to the further study of a vision so intricate as this, to announce some slender line of analysis in order to be clearly understood. Let us, in the outset, consider still more deeply the emotion which the man exhibits; then afterward we can, with more certainty, trace out the bearing it has upon his history.

I. It has to be acknowledged that Isaiah's experience looks very queer. It gives us a vast surprise; it strikes us as singularly unexpected and somewhat illogical; we should suppose that such a spectacle would have been quite otherwise met, he would be filled with delight. He would respond to the inspiration of a supreme moment in his career. That song would arouse him into adoration; or, at the very least, such a mystic and sublime disclosure would frighten him into a hushed self-abasement of simple reverence or humility. We do not understand these demonstrations; we shall have to examine them before we pronounce.

1. Begin with the feeling: just what was it that agitated Isaiah to this degree of passionate outcry? It is likely that he was neither jubilant nor absolutely scared by what he had witnessed. This emotion is neither exhilaration of joy nor cowardice of fear. It can not be anything more nor less than the prostration of a human soul in utter abandonment and dismay at the discovery of its own personal guilt. The words here translated, "I am undone," are rendered in the margin, "I am cut off." That was the ancient formula for declaring rejection by God when a sinner in Israel was excommunicated from the Israelite hope. A Jew like Isaiah knew their meaning. The Septuagint version gives them with a New Testament suggestion: "I am pierced through." Such was the language which Luke used when describing the effect of Peter's wonderful talk at Pentecost; he says the

people were "pricked in the heart." The figure is unmistakable; it represents divine truth as a spear—an arrow penetrating through all subterfuges and concealments till it has reached a man's conscience and wounded him with a perceptible anguish.

"For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

This feeling of Isaiah, therefore, consisted in a conscious conviction of sin, produced by the sublime and overpowering exhibition of divine holiness. He was startled by this view which was opened to him, of the corruption of his own heart. He cried out in consternation and foreboding when he discovered he had such ill-regulated desires lodged in the center of his being, such awful depravity, such manifest exposure to an immediate stroke of God's wrath. Whenever a man has genuine conviction of sin, he does not say, "I have done a wrong thing," but he says with a deeper intelligence, "I am a wrong thing myself; I am wrong everywhere, I am unclean through and through." He knows and admits in the sad sincerity of his contrition that it is not his tongue, nor his hand, nor his foot, which is to be blamed; but all that is within him, body, soul, and spirit, is base, defiled, corrupt, and polluted. That is what Isaiah realizes all at once. Not only are his lips unclean in one instance, but they make him a man of unclean lips; they

characterize him; he must be judged by his lips; his moral register is fixed.

2. Then notice another thing, which is somewhat suggestive. In our common customs of speech, men are very shy of using the word "holy" or the word "holiness." Especially profane men, whom it really exercises oftentimes to frame ingenious oaths to swear with satisfactory originality, shun this small, two-syllabled vocable. At very respectable funerals you may overhear bystanders say of the departed man: "He was a kind neighbor, if ever there was one;" or "He was a good man, honestly solid in every bargain he made;" or "He was most amiable and courteous, and public-spirited and sober, and moral and correct in his family also, and liberal;" but you will never hear one worldling say of another one "He was a holy man!" No; all worldlings prefer to skip that one plain singular word. And yet every man's eternal reckoning depends only upon what that one word stands for. The Book of God says distinctly for us all: "Follow holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."

3. One thing more in this prophet's experience: the almost fatal despair into which he fell. He exclaimed, "Woe is me!" He appears to think that the wrath of the living God was going to let loose its fiercest lightnings of retribution at that instant, and destroy him utterly. Our astonishment is instinctive, for nothing really seems to have happened sufficient to account for this complete hopelessness. Indeed, the illogical character of his abrupt conclusion shows the

more excessive all the time he is speaking. We are becoming convinced that this prophet is moved by his insight rather than by his sight. He sees far more in this vision than we are able to comprehend from the mere written description he has given us of it. One of our modern poets, who a few years ago found his way into a pulpit for a season, has offered to the commentators a very acceptable figure for their illustration here.

"Some of you," he wrote once, "may have been watching a near and beautiful landscape in the region of mountains and eternal snows, till you have been really exhausted by its very richness, and till the distant hills which bounded it have seemed, you knew not why, to limit or contract the view—and then a veil has been withdrawn, and new hills not looking as if they belonged to the earth, yet giving another character to every object which did belong to it, have unfolded themselves before you. This is a likeness, imperfect, very imperfect (yet it is one), of that revelation which must have been made to the inner eye of the prophet when he saw another throne than the throne of the house of David, another king than Uzziah or Jotham, another train than that of priests or minstrels in the temple, other winged forms than those golden ones which overshadowed the mercy-seat. Each object was the counterpart of one that was then, or had been at some time, before his bodily eyes; yet it did not borrow its shape or color from those visible things; they evidently derived their sub-

stance and radiance from those which were invisible; separated from them, they could impart no luster for they had none. The monarchs of the house of David reigned because that King was reigning whom God had set upon his holy hill of Zion; because he lived on, when, one and another, they dropped into their sepulchers; because in him dwelt the light and the power by which each of them might illumine his own darkness, sustain his own weakness. Those symbols and services of the Temple were not, as priests and people often thought, mere earthly machinery for scaling a distant heaven; they were witnesses of a heaven nigh at hand, of a God dwelling in the very midst of his people, and of God's being surrounded by spirits which do his pleasure, hearkening to the voice of his words."

Let us drop ourselves down into the spirit of this illustration. Isaiah saw more than that magnificent spectacle of the Throned One upon his chair in the Holy of Holies. He saw with his spiritual eyes, in each of the objects ranged there, the significant meaning it bore. The altar, the seraphs, the Monarch, the burning coals—he understood every reach of their admonition. The whole character of God, the office of the prophetic ministry, the grandeur of the gospel, the awful tasks before his own life of endeavor—these were thrown out into conspicuous relief upon his clouded future in one amazing flash of disclosure.

So you appreciate this confession at once, bitter and bewildered as it seems; it is as if he had cried out

before the worlds and the ages: "I am a hopeless sinner; and my race are all hopeless sinners; in the sight of an infinitely pure God, utterly lost and condemned; undone and ruined, unclean, unclean! there is none that doeth good, no, not a soul of man or woman, no, not one; my heart is hard, my will is obstinate, my aims are low, my wishes are sensual, my associations are bad; we are all crushed down together, foul, displeasing, in the sight of a holy God —thrice holy. Do you ask me how I learned this? Look aloft a moment! I have just found out; see yonder! Behold that Form on the throne! White as the stainless snow, and pure as the morning sunshine that falls over it! look into eternity! see the Sovereign of eternity, who inhabits it and fills it, whose very train glitters as it floats above my guilty head! How can I abide it! Hark, a moment; hear the amazing song which they are singing over and over, and I dare not touch so much as one note of it—once. They cry Holy, Holy, Holy, and they keep crying it, and every stroke of a harpstring is a reproach to anybody like me. Oh, how can I stand it! This cuts me off; I am undone, undone for ever; for mine eyes have seen the Lord of Hosts!"

II. Thus much, then, for the details of this prophet's vision of God in the temple on his throne; we need but a little space now for an inquiry after the bearing it has, and was meant to have upon his work.

Remember that it was this very prophet who told the people, over and over again, what he learned here

at the beginning of his ministry. "Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty. Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread." No man can serve God well who is not suitably afraid of him. It is an unsafe thing to trifle with a Being who sits on the throne of the universe. It is true that "perfect love casteth out fear." But "perfect love" is a rare attainment; and as long as our love is not what it has to be, it will have to be supplemented and strengthened by a forcefulness of salutary alarms which will keep it alert. Now and then it has to be expected that the Almighty will stir even his children up to serious fidelity; he will teach them with visions of his terrible glory. Such visions will strengthen more than they will alarm. The fear will render us cautious, and inspire our souls with sedateness and reverent prudence. The heroism of endurance will say: "Here am I; send me." "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear; for our God is a consuming fire."

CHAPTER XI.

A MAN OF UNCLEAN LIPS.

"I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips."—*Isaiah vi : 5.*

There was a lad once who shipped as a captain's boy on a bark in commission for southern waters. Through the long voyage, down toward the tropics, his curiosity was awakened concerning the strange invisible line in the ocean which he had heard called the equator. He never ceased watching for it, asking the officers for the signs of it, waiting impatiently to have it appear. The hands grew fatigued with questions from his lips. At last he was told suddenly one morning that it had been passed while he was asleep; and when he expressed his painful disappointment, the captain tried to comfort him with the announcement that nobody ever saw the equator. "Nobody ever saw the equator?" said the child; "the great line that separates the north from the south upon the round world?" And the captain answered mysteriously, "No, boy, the equator is one of the lines that is always crossed in the night."

The conversion of a human soul from a state of sin and misery to a state of pardon and peace is another of these lines. The final loss of an abandoned soul is

made along another of these lines; reprobation is always crossed in the night. The providences of God work up to the crisis of decision in each case, and then the unalterable change comes suddenly under the sovereign pressure of the Holy Ghost. We should be interested to know, if the facts were attainable, whether this particular incident in his spiritual history might be considered the date of Isaiah's conversion. We have already ascertained that genuine conviction of sin is most naturally brought about by the sudden and vivid awaking of a soul to the apprehension of the holiness of God. It is an effect wrought by the spirit of divine grace. In some way or other an immediate display of the Lord's character and attributes is made; then the mind sees it, the soul receives it, the heart accepts it, and with one rush of intense feeling the whole being of the man starts out into penitent surrender and affectionate faith; so the new life is begun.

It is well known that Jonathan Edwards was suddenly converted as by a flash of light in the moment of reading a single verse of the New Testament into contact with which he was brought by a series of unusual circumstances. He was at home in his father's house; some ordinary hindrance kept him from going to church one Sabbath with the family; a couple of hours in prospect with nothing to do sent him listlessly into the library; the sight of a dull volume with no title on the leather back of it piqued curiosity as to what it could be; he opened it at random and found it to be a Bible; and then his eye

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caught this verse: " Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen."

He tells us in his journal that the immediate effect of it was awakening and alarming to his soul; for it brought him a most novel and most extensive thought of the vastness and majesty of the true Sovereign of the universe. Out of this grew the astonishing pain of guilt for having resisted such a Monarch so long and for having served him so poorly. And whereas he had hitherto had slight notions of his own wickedness and very little poignancy of acute remorse, now he felt the deepest contrition. It is easy to give you his own words. The experience is remarkable for the clearness and frankness with which he relates it.

He says: " Never any words of Scripture appeared to me like these before; there came into my soul, and was, as it were, diffused through it, a sense of the glory of the Divine Being—different from anything I had ever previously experienced." Not many days after this he wrote that he had stayed in the contemplation alone of the doctrine of God's holiness; this had forced him into " brokenness of heart and poverty of spirit." And then he adds somewhat later: " My heart panted after this to lie low before God, as in the dust; I wished I might be nothing and that God might be all." Here, we see, is a precise reproduction of Isaiah's experience, as we are now studying it. The man saw the " King, eternal, immortal, invisible; " it was as if he had a vision of his Divine Maker

face to face; he saw his sins in the fresh light of heavenly display; he saw them as God saw them; then he fell on his knees, humiliated in the throes of great contrition and intolerable shame.

But Isaiah's cleared eyesight saw farther than this. His vision of the infinite purity of God not only lighted up his individual soul, so that he beheld all its foul chambers, but it also opened the recesses of other people's hearts; now it flung radiant illumination all around him. So he knew that other men were sinful likewise. When such a God set human guilt in the light of his spotlessly holy countenance, it was not possible for any one to remain concealed. Ordinary show of perfection shrinks with dismay from such extreme tests. When filigree jewelry is going to a royal presentation, it shuns the plain daylight, and delays for the less dangerous hours after the candles are lit. As if in one awfully humiliating moment of luminous exposure, Isaiah perceived that not a single creature of God now remained stainless in his sight. He was thrice-holy; and the men who stood before him were seen in the light of his countenance to be thrice vile in their hearts.

Is this literally true? We agree that Isaiah may think as humbly and as penitently of himself as he pleases; but still, just because he has discovered he is a man of unclean lips, is he authorized to assert that he dwells in the midst of a people of unclean lips? Is everybody bad? Was Coleridge right when he taught thus: "A fall of some sort or other is the funda-

mental postulate of the moral history of man; without this hypothesis man is unintelligible; with it every phenomenon is explicable; the mystery itself is too profound for human insight." Then was Paul right when he told the Christians at Rome, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." "By one man sin entered the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men for that all have sinned. Now we know, that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." Is this really true?

Nor is this all; note next to this the phraseology Isaiah employs here; for it further illustrates and explains his singular experience. He cries: "I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips." Why does he specify his lips as being the admitted seat of his uncleanness?

The answer to this question is most interesting, for it shows us exactly whence and by what occasion his consciousness of guilt started into recognition. All those seraphs were singing with their lips; the word which terrified him was on their lips in the Trisagion; the "holy, holy, holy"—those three tones of ascription which were at once fatal as an arraignment—that was what slew his conceit; precisely that was what showed him to himself. That word "holiness" he dared not take on his lips, for his lips were unclean, he was a man of unclean lips. He was tainted with moral as well as spiritual impurity. So he stood di-

rectly in his own way. He was so wrong that he could not even sing anything which was perfectly right. He was so wicked that he could not worship. And everybody else was as wretchedly off as he was. No living soul could be accepted; all humankind were people of unclean lips.

Here we leave the vision for the present. Our conceptions of it are painfully inadequate; such a spectacle disdains ordinary language. That venerable, grave, undescribed Form, lifted high upon the throne —the angels of living flame; with their reverent wings and their song—these must have joined their influence in producing an impression upon the mind of that alarmed beholder. We look sympathetically upon these demonstrations, for really we seem to think we understand them to some extent. There, now, he lies upon his face abashed and silent; he has in his heart the great weight of a terrible conviction; he has seen God.

Two practical inferences remain to be stated as we separate, lest we lose the main advantage of such a study as a picture for our times.

The first of them suggests itself on the instant; if any man has a misgiving that his conviction of sin has possibly been imperfect, until now, he certainly understands that, in order to make it profounder, he needs to come up more and more evidently before the presence of the divine purity. He must reproduce Isaiah's vision in his prayers. The seraphim's song must appear in his hymns. We may be sure that the moment

any one of us gains even so much as a glimpse of God's face, as an eye of passionate faith will be certain to find it, we shall know more than we shall want of ourselves. It never helps any one to begin desperately to study his wickednesses with a view to outroot them. It is better for him to keep looking at God. The objective study of Christ, his life, his sayings, his demeanor, his character, his attributes, is far safer and more profitable for growth in grace than any painful act of self-examination. Oh, how many of us would turn back abashed if an open sight of heaven were vouchsafed us! It is dreadful to think of a feeling of humiliation at a glimpse of glory; but if it lays us low in shame only to lift us up in pardon; we could well afford to seek it.

Then the other inference is this: he who has suffered himself to tolerate trivial notions of disobedience has not yet ever had a proper conception of his Maker who is one day to be his judge. I believe if we should gain a notion of that form of Jehovah in the throne, the one flash we might catch of it would hush our voices into silence; the waving wings of the seraphs would fill us with bewilderment; and the anthems they would always keep singing would stir our souls with longing after a better life. If a wand could be waved, just here, now, for this moment of thoughtfulness, a word of command be spoken, so as to exhibit that scene in the temple as Isaiah saw it, not one of us would ever again think about sin against a holy God as we sometimes do now. Such a vision would never be forgotten. If

we could just lift our eyes and cry out to each other: "Oh, look there! See the King in his beauty on the throne! Hear the seraphim singing!" If this were before our eyes and ears, oh, believe me! believe me! we should wish we had never, never committed even one sin against such a God and Father as that!

"I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession; that thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: which in his times he shall show who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto: whom no man hath seen, nor can see; to whom be honor and power everlasting. Amen."

CHAPTER XII.

GENUINE CONVICTION OF SIN.

'Mine eyes have seen the King."—*Isaiah vi: 5.*

There is one literary disadvantage in the notion of a republican form of government; it lacks in style. We who belong to a nation like ours shall never come to an adequate conception of a king, with his unique grouping of attendants, his palace, his pomp and pageantry, with his robes, his throne and his scepter. We can not understand why human beings, lords and ladies, in their golden garments and blazonry of violet and purple, flashing with crusted gems from a thousand mines, will glory in prostrating themselves at the feet of a sovereign, who resembles a man or a woman, precisely like other men or women, only with more jewels and wearing costlier clothes. We grow up with foreign habit of speech and rules of behavior; the glitter and glare of sensuous courtliness fails to make the impression that monarchs seem to demand.

Out of this education of ours comes a different reading of large parts of even the inspired Word of God. For the Bible invariably represents our Divine Maker as a King; Jesus Christ is pictured as a real King of kings; heaven is a city, the capital of a kingdom, in which, by and by, the saints are to sit upon thrones,

and behold the King's face. But our loyalty does not keep pace with our imagination of splendor or felicity. Many a believer will talk upon his deathbed of the joys into which he expects to go, and of the pains and disabilities he eagerly longs to lay down, without at all commensurately taking into anticipation the faith that "the Lamb is all the glory of Immanuel's Land." "Ask a class of Japanese students," says an oriental writer, "a school of young students of fourteen to sixteen, to tell their dearest wishes; and, if they have frank confidence in their questioner, perhaps nine out of ten of them will answer, "To die for His Majesty, our Emperor!" We all remember, likewise, how the missionaries sent word over the sea from this enthusiastic realm that some noble women in the Flowery Land fashioned ropes out of their beautiful black braids of hair in a loyal surrender, in order to drag the chariot of one king they almost adored.

It is to be feared that we have too little of such passionate emotion. We kindle slowly, and we do not keep warm very long. Here now it is somewhat hard for us to enter into the feeling of Isaiah falling on his face before the vision of Jehovah in the temple. The truth is, this prophet knew that he was all exposed in the presence of his Maker in one awful moment of disclosure. He was seen as well as seeing. He was looking at God, and God was looking at him. It is among the proverbs that we find the words, "In the light of the King's countenance is life." But Isaiah could have better described his experience in these

words of a psalm when he was gazing on the face of God in the throne:

"For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled. Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance."

Let us see if we can not show the force of this figure by a reference once more to the Japanese scholars. Suppose one of those loyal young men were to be watched, as he is out on the campus with his class, in the midst of his sport with his fellows. Suppose he should be interrupted in his games, his quarrels, his wrestles, his tricks, by the cry, "The emperor is coming through the grounds!" He looks up to find the royal cortege at his very side. He falls on his knees before those eyes of majesty. Would not his first wonder be as to how much the king had overheard of his language, how much he had witnessed of his behavior? Alas, how reckless he had been! Perhaps he knew very well about that Serene Monarch's honesty. Now what must he think of the lie which he just told, in the treacheries of the student games! Perhaps he knew of his emperor's gentleness; now what must he think of his tempestuous outbursts of spite! Perhaps he knew about his fame for courteous manners; now what must such a princely knight of honor think of his rough vulgarities! Perhaps he noticed that His Majesty had just come from an act of worship in the temple; what must he think of the blasphemy that he had only a moment ago sworn in

the teeth of his antagonist! Low in the dust, how he would grovel in his fear, his shame and self-loathing!

This is what is meant by the confession of unworthiness found in the psalm. This is what is intended by setting one's secret sins full in the light of a King's countenance. The sight of that pure face becomes a register of his own impurity. The meanness looks worse when a noble monarch beholds it. The coarseness seems worse when such courtesy looks down upon it. The vision of Isaiah is as simple as this is, but the depth of the shame and remorse is as much lower as the infinity of the Almighty is higher. And we certainly grow clearer in terrible crises of disclosure like this as to "the sinfulness of sin."

So we attain the conclusion of our study. The doctrine enfolded in the entire vision of the prophet is this: It is the disclosure of a character in God infinitely pure which is the surest to produce in any conscientious human being the heaviest measure of genuine conviction.

I am anxious that you see this clearly, so I lay alongside of it one or two striking illustrations which the inspired history furnishes along the ages. It can easily be proved that the proposition thus indicated is familiar as a principle through the Scriptures, old and new.

What was the chief purpose of this vision? It may have had some subordinate ends, but its first object was to exhibit the attribute of divine holiness. Keep this in mind—even at the risk of slight repetition—

and we can better understand Isaiah's manifestations of feeling under it. It did show God's power; he was represented on a throne. It displayed also his supremacy; there blazed a train of glory through the whole temple. But not for any end like these was so extraordinary a scene flashed out upon Isaiah's eyes. This throne, this train, this smoke were all mere accompaniments—the simple paraphernalia of that living truth which entered when the song began. The teaching of this spectacle is to be taught in the song, and in the song alone. That one word, three times repeated, was what the prophet was summoned to hear. Just in that was his lesson. This sublime, spotless, ineffable, inimitable holiness of Jehovah, whose message he was to bear to that people around him—this was the forcible presentation of his vision. It was sure that, the moment he saw it, he would have conviction of sin.

You remember the story of Manoah, the father of Samson. A promise was made to him; he was visited by a messenger; up to this time he bore his honors bravely. But he was unacquainted with the fact that a veritable theophany had been vouchsafed him; he did not know the Being whom his wife had seen earlier; she said he was "a man of God," and in her confused description stated that "his countenance was like unto the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible." Still, neither Manoah nor his wife felt any especial emotion of alarm. With a certain measure of exhilaration they went about, briskly preparing a

meat-offering on a rock. Not till the flame lit up the flesh of the kid did the notion of sin become prominent; then in one excited instant the heavenly Visitor stepped bodily into the midst of the fire, and rose up towards the sky with the ascending smoke until he vanished out of their sight; then they preceived that the "Angel of the Lord" had been their company. The Second Person of the adorable Trinity had disclosed his whole Godhead to those two Israelites, and made them the promise of a famous son. But now notice: instead of rejoicing, Manoah was frightened. He had discovered that Jehovah had been in the flame on the rock. And an ineffable sense of the Divine Presence filled him with the shame of an utter unworthiness, and awaked in his soul premonitions of judgment to come. He was overwhelmed with grief and penitence for his sins. Then he cried to his wife, "we shall surely die, because we have seen God!" The vision of divine holiness drove him directly into deep conviction.

So in the case of Simon Peter once, out upon the surface of Lake Gennesaret. After our Lord had finished his discourse he bade the old fisherman push away from the land, and cast his net for a draught. In simple obedience Simon did his behest; there was a miracle, and fishes swarmed over the thwarts as never before in the sight of Capernaum. A fresh and evidently surprising conception of the divine attributes was planted in this fisherman's mind, directly in the range of his commonplace profession; that miracle

was a disclosure of the true Godhead of Jesus. This ought, by all fair logic, to have exhilarated the one beholder who best understood it; we might have expected he would go even beyond the uncouth boisterousness of his usual enthusiasm; on the contrary, however, we find him on his knees in the bottom of the boat and crying out: "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" Was ever anything more illogical in sentiment, or inopportune in utterance! It was strange to think of the Saviour's going away from him, out on that wide Sea of Galilee. Indeed, that was the last thing Simon could wish, if he knew what he was talking about; he was not ready to disown a Redeemer he had given his whole heart to serve. What had an unusual exhibition of marketable luck to do with Peter's moral character? Those "partners" of his were "astonished," but they shoved off with the other boats laden with the spoils. Simon alone is left with the Master, abjectly confessing guilt. Disclosure of God brings conviction of sin.

And just so with Job: when the Lord answered him out of a terrible whirlwind, the patriarch seems to have forgotton that this was only what he had been asking for during all the exasperating discussions with his so-called comforters. Instead of bidding a glad welcome to a Divine Champion, so thoroughly informed, his voice breaks forth with an indescribable sense of pain, as he confesses his hopelessness in sin: "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee: Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

So then, finally, it would follow, if the conclusion thus reached, be the true one, that the most scriptural, as well as the most certain, method of producing genuine conviction of sin in the consciences of the impenitent would be found in bringing evidently and vividly before their minds and hearts the transcendent holiness of God himself.

I believe the one solitary experience worthy of our trust, is the awe-struck prostration of Isaiah here, in the abasement of guilt, before holiness. To attain it, for ourselves or for others, we ought somehow to present the serene perfections of Jehovah himself in clear display. We need not hurl accusations, nor thunder curses of arraignment ; we are to reproduce the vision of God, and submit each soul to the test.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SEEKING LOVE OF GOD.

"Then flew one of the seraphim unto me."—*Isaiah vi: 6.*

This scene has grown familiar to us with our repeated rehearsal. Upon his face lies the mourning prophet Isaiah, his entire soul hushed and burdened under deep conviction of sin. The Temple seems all glowing in transparent exhibition; curtains and doors for once in the view do not appear to count; for through the courts, over even the barriers set for the priests, across intervening partitions of space, one's eye ranges at will. The supernatural spectacle has flung open everything, and the sacred mysteries are exposed at once; the whole building shows brilliantly, as if flooded with a radiant and tremulous light. On the throne sits a Figure of awful majesty; seraphim minister to him, waiting reverently on either side; smoke of incense fills the apartment as songs echo through the air: God is in disclosure before mortal eyes.

If now our understanding of this wonderful scene is accurate, if it is really intended to teach the successive homeward steps of a sinner returning to God, then the time has come for a provision of help. Isaiah can go no further alone. The supreme moment is

reached when human weakness will have to be supplemented by divine interposition.

At this instant, the spectacle changes rapidly. Thus far, one would suppose that the exhibition had been constructed in entire neglect of the man, or in unconsciousness of his presence in the edifice. No allusion was made to him by word or gesture. A grand outgleam of glory was flashed into view ; but no one intimated that this human being standing there had anything deeper of personal interest in it, than if he had caught a glimpse of it alone, coming by accident to the discovery. But the moment he is prostrated in his shame and contrition, there starts out toward him a marvelous series of recognitions. Then it is that we find out the whole vision has been designed solely for him in person.

What is done is this : one of the angelic beings, who had been standing and singing beside the throne, now, at perhaps some unperceived signal from the King, left his place swiftly, advancing directly to the prophet : " Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar : and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips ; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged."

Few words will be necessary to show that the relief offered the prophet here was divine in its source. It came directly out of the very center of that supernatural glory of God.

It is noticeable that not one effort, nor even a sem-

blance of an effort, was put forth in his own behalf by Isaiah. In the frantic outcry of his soul—"I am undone"—he throws up even the hope of any deliverance whatsoever. He proposes no compromises; he offers no engagement of reform. Nor is he urged to any. He is not told that he has so much as another chance. Not a single question is put for him to answer. He entertains no purpose to dispute the conclusion reached. He simply lies on the ground helpless, leaving his helplessness, if anything, to cry for him.

Moreover, the relief must come as the accusation came. Up to this moment in his history Isaiah never had been aware of the fact that he was so thoroughly unclean in the sight of a holy being like God. The new standard of his estimation was found only in the infinite purity of that King he saw, whose praise the seraphim were singing. It must never be forgotten that genuineness of conviction of sin is to be distinguished from mere natural remorse at failure, from ordinary compunctions of conscience, from sudden shame at discovery, and from righteous alarm at peril, by the plain *direction* it takes and the standard of reference it announces. If it be true repentance, it will say with David, in an unmistakable confession: "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight; that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest."

Let us get this point clear, before we go any further.

It will serve our purpose exactly to trace out this experience of a royal sinner, whose sin was so conspicuous, and whose repentance was so much to our edification. "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned." Now, some would say, perhaps carelessly, here was an unauthorized discrimination; David had sinned against Uriah, and against Bathsheba, and against his own manhood, and against that whole realm he ruled, by complicated crimes of murder, falsehood, adultery, and impious presumption. Not against God, and against God "only," had he done his great wrong. But true penitence erects a true standard; it is intelligent as well as self-abasing. David knew whom he had offended. Through and through the concentric circles of his lofty responsibility, his conscience led the way to the innermost one of all. He had broken God's law. Full before the undefiled glory of a holy Jehovah, he seemed quite to forget, for the time being, everything else except what God must think of him.

So always: a really repentant sinner will feel as if his guilt were all lying in an unparalleled enormity of aggravation. He has transgressed a law that is right; he has outraged goodness that is limitless; he has rebelled against an omnipotence he can not now face; he has slightingly turned away an affection which is invaluable; he has wronged a beneficent friend, who never did him any wrong; he has mocked a monarch, established in authority, without a shadow of extenuation or excuse.

With this kept in view, there is no room for argument. Human deliverance must come forth from the the throne. Isaiah, crying there, in all the abasement and abandonment of his shame, had no need to thank even the seraph with the coal of fire in his hands. The coal came from the King. The altar was the King's. The seraphim were only the King's messengers. Every step in the scheme of human salvation, from its earliest beginning, at the new birth, to its latest triumph in the new song, is God's. "Salvation belongeth unto the Lord." When the redeemed in heaven sing their highest songs of ascription, they can say no more, no less, than this. John tells us in the Revelation what he heard behind the veil:

"After this I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."

Isaiah was like a culprit at the bar, whose case is closed. The judge, the advocates, the jury, do all the talking. The condemned prisoner seems to have no chance. Nobody shows any attention to him. His day is over. He can only groan, wipe his eyes, stand up, and take his sentence. If there be even a whisper concerning pardon, pardon lies somewhere out in the dark. That can come from some unknown executive alone; officially, the court is incompetent to touch it.

The man is given over to the sheriff's hands; there remains only a fearful looking-for of judgment. He cannot go for forgiveness, even if it be in store for his needs.

Pious Wickliffe used to pray:—" O good Lord, save me *gratis!*" And Christ does save *gratis*, if he saves at all. Sinners must be content to owe everything they receive to the recognized grace which shines on Jesus' forehead and warms in his heart.

The story has been told of a company of sailors who were wrecked on the high seas. They were out in a boat, and hope was at an end. A squall upset their frail craft, but they had skill enough to plant the faint group of still living mariners on the overturned keel. There in the night and the day they drifted, foodless, lonely, chilled, without a sign of relief; and the week wore on. Ultimately they were saved by a passing ship. When after unparalleled sufferings they came to land, the question was put to them, " What was your heaviest trial?" And one replied: " It was the feeling that nobody could see us; nobody could be made aware that we were out there dying; we might cry or pray or shout or scream, and nothing would do any good; the land, the ocean, the sky, were all deaf and dumb!" There are crises of simple desperation in an immortal soul's spiritual history very much resembling this; left thus, there is nothing but swift death for an outlook before it. Alone in a silent and unheeding universe, what could possibly be of assistance?

Such a crisis of experience and destiny this prophet Isaiah certainly had now reached. Just here the seeking love of God was brought into exercise. Hence the two most important words in our present text are those with which it opens and ends: "Then flew one of the seraphim unto me." The word "then" marks the date of the crisis, the word "me" marks the seat of it. The soul in danger was this one, and if any interposition was coming it must come now. The relief must be instantly given and the application of it would have to be individual. The man could not go to God; hence God must go to him, and that at once.

The psalmist has sung: "As for God, his way is perfect." It has been God's way from the beginning to go forth seeking the lost. While our first parents were cowering in their hiding-place in the Garden of Eden, sinful and hopeless, the Voice of the Lord God was heard walking amongst the trees, and the question was put, "Adam, where art thou?"

David afterward tells a like tale of his wonderful deliverance: "The sorrows of hell compassed me about; the snares of death prevented me; in my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried to my God: and he did hear my voice out of his temple, and my cry did enter into his ears. He bowed the heavens also, and came down: and darkness was under his feet. And he rode upon a cherub and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind. He made darkness his secret place; his pavilion round about him were dark waters and thick clouds of the skies. He

sent from above, he took me; he drew me out of many waters."

This must be what Isaiah himself means, when he says, long subsequently to this, what Paul thinks he was very bold in asserting: "I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me." The Saviour came to seek the lost.

"Do your gods love you?" asked a missionary once of some Indians to whom he was trying to teach the transcendent lesson of divine grace. And the answer came with a cheerless melancholy in it: "The gods never think of loving." Then the Christian preacher told the story of grace, as the gospel reveals it, by quietly quoting the passage we all know: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son; that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved." The sons of the forest were evidently astonished. "Say that again," a chief replied; "that is large light; say it again!" No one ever heard of God's leaving heaven to go after one of his forlorn and lost creatures; here we learn that the Maker of the universe forsook his throne, gave up his princely estate, actually journeyed down into a world full of pain and guilt and pollution, just to save the souls of fallen men.

As we pause in our exposition of this passage, the grand spectacle, as Isaiah saw it, hurries itself up be-

fore our imagination. There is the temple with its doors flung wide open, its inner curtains lifted, the whole structure blazing with the supernatural light. The prophet lies on his face, crushed beneath the sense of his guilt. Out of the ranks of the shining ones comes a seraph flying with wings of fire toward the mourning sinner who admits he is hopeless and lost. It is evident that God means Isaiah to be saved, and so sends his angel with not a moment's delay. The scene is transcendent. There is no picture like it besides, in the whole Bible. The golden glory flashes in those faces; and all because of the seeking love of God for one lost soul!

The direction of Isaiah's chapter of vision, from this instant, is seen to take a turn upward toward the serene light of pardon and security. For, whereas, even down to this point in the motion of those to whom we are looking for the dramatic action, everything has been rapidly rushing into discouragement, hopelessness and dispair, now there is an abrupt change. Isaiah's cries of abandonment cease. His prospects brighten. He is no longer a waif in the universe. A seraph has actually been sent to look him up; and at last there is hope for his soul.

It does not seem possible that any human being can ever have received the least shadow of right to suppose himself redeemed genuinely from sin and perdition, unless he has fully apprehended the grace sovereignly bestowed upon him in this seeking love of Christ the Saviour. We may speak as familiarly as

we will about our coming to Jesus; there remains ever the supreme fact: "We love him because he first loved us."

"Awake, my soul, to joyful lays, and sing thy great Redeemer's praise;
He justly claims a song from me: his loving kindness, oh, how free!
He saw me ruined in the fall, yet loved me notwithstanding all;
He saved me from my lost estate: his loving kindness, oh, how great!"

"In this was manifested the love of God toward us because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

CHAPTER XIV.

A LIVE COAL FROM THE ALTAR.

"Having a live coal in his hand.—*Isaiah vi: 6.*

The application of atonement, so that any given transgressor may receive it, is sovereign on the part of God, and wrought entirely by free grace.

Such a lesson is taught us here in Isaiah's vision, by all the circumstances taken together under which that prophet was addressed when he was joyously informed by the mysterious voice of the seraph, that his iniquities were removed and his sins purged. The relief came from the altar. The angel brought it. The King sent the angel. With absolutely no intervention of his own whatsoever, immediately upon the acknowledgment of desperate necessity, the full supply of help arrived. The remarkable characteristic of his pardon is that it was provided graciously by an agent entirely external and independent of himself, And the grand lesson for us now is, that for any convicted sinner, relief is found through sovereign intervention of the Spirit of divine grace.

For you are carefully to remember, that the altar had stood in the court all the time, just as it stood now; the coals shone upon it, the tongs were close by. But there was no being to furnish fire to Isaiah; there

was not one person in the universe to whom he could look; there was not one whom he could impress into service; there was not one on whom he had any possible claim. A single coal of sacrifice would help him; but not unless it could be brought to touch his lips; and so, for all the good that wonderful altar could do him now, it might as well have been kindled on another planet as out there just within reach. For divine intelligence only to provide our atonement, and store its treasury of merit full in sight of human necessity, would be nothing less than cruel mockery. It must be sovereignly applied to each soul.

So much seems established, then; all pardon for transgression in the present, and all promise for the future, are the free gifts of divine grace; their source is in God. The plan for our salvation is altogether his: "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake."

But now just what was it exactly, which the seraph brought to this weeping prophet? That leads us on to our second subject of consideration, namely, the nature of the relief proffered to a penitent sinner. We shall find it to be an atonement, made by *sacrifice*, to satisfy the requirements of God's broken law.

In the vision of Isaiah, we are told that one of the attendant seraphim left his post beside the throne, and flew out over the space beyond the Holy of Holies till he reached the altar in the court; from the midst of its glowing embers he took with the tongs a live coal; this he came and laid on the prophet's mouth.

Now, I think that expositors have wasted a great amount of valuable space in trying to show what altar in particular the celestial messenger visited. There were no coals to be found upon that one which stood in the Holy Place; it was for burning sweet incense of gums and spices. And there is no sense in the action whatever, if all that the seraph fetched was a small fragment of odorous resin, symbolic of worship; the soul is not saved by worship. The live coal came from the altar of burnt offering. Victim after victim had flamed on that structure, life for life, in solemn service of sacrifice, atonement for guilt. The fire once kindled had never been suffered to go out. It had been lit by a miraculous flame from heaven at the first, and the Levites guarded it from extinction, as they would their lives. That coal was part of a sacrifice. When laid upon Isaiah's lips it meant an atonement for sin. God sent him no unconditional pardon, for all he was so humble and penitent before him. God never pardons anybody unconditionally. His law demands satisfaction. He has not ever in even so much as one case relaxed its claims. He sent us Christ, his Son, to die and become a sacrifice, so that we might have something outside of ourselves to plead.

The name of Jesus is the only name given under heaven among men, whereby we may be saved. He takes his appellation of "the Lamb of God" from his priestly work of sacrifice. All those old bloody rites of Moses referred directly to him as the victim on the

altar. Everywhere in the dawning of that early dispensation there was a star-light of Christ, who was to come at last in the full noon of gospel day.

Look, for instance, at the ancient institution of the annual Day of Atonement. On other occasions inferior priests slaughtered the animals and prepared the offering. But upon this anniversary, the high priest alone officiated. And all the drudgery, clear down to the lighting of the lamps and the kindling of fire for incense, a long work of preparation, requiring sometimes more than two weeks to complete it, so the Rabbins tell us, was undertaken by him. That day was a day of days to him. He was to put aside his jeweled miter, and wear none of the so-called "golden garments"; even his shining breast-plate of precious stones had to be relinquished, his ephod and his bells. Clad in simple linen, a linen girdle, a linen coat, a linen miter, he alone entered the Holy of Holies, he alone laid the victim on the coals, and he alone led the people's scape-goat away into the wilderness.

All this was typical of the solitary errand of our Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, what garments of glory he laid aside, when that day of days came in which he was to minister at the altar of solemn atonement! There was no remission of sins without sacrifice, and he came to be the ministrant to offer it. He needed no help; he allowed no interference. One altar, one victim, one priest—this was all that was prescribed, all that was permitted.

Did you ever ponder the pertinency of the fact that

none among all the disciples of our Lord, not one of all the adherents who followed him, was permitted to die with him? He was condemned as a rebel; yet not a single man or woman who succored him, or sustained him, in that so-called insurrection, suffered for it. A few of his friends talked about it; one of them said outright on a conspicuous occasion, "Let us go and die with him"; but none of them ever did. The meaning of this is very plain. It was an infinitely wise precaution against mistake. It would, without a doubt, have misled some feeble minds, if by any accidental confusion another name had been coupled with his in the dying hour on the cross. It was just as well that all those disciples forsook him and fled. One priest, one Lamb, was all that was needed.

So, then, as we come back to the story we are studying, all we need to keep in mind is the fact that Isaiah thoroughly understood and accepted the significance of that coal which came from the altar. It was the offer of a sufficient sacrifice, a full atonement. It is in this particular that the earthly career of our Saviour possesses such power. It is not his correct life, so much as his sacrificial death, which sways the race; it is not so much his pure moral maxims as it is his vicarious obedience unto law; it is not so much his creed, as it is his cross. Just now, within a little while, some one has said—and it surely is the more wisely said, because he who said it spent some invaluable years in denying it beforehand: "Unless the Apostolic language does transgress not only every rule

of literal construction, but all parallels in the latitude of metaphor, it certainly declares Jesus to be a Redeemer in some sense, which no notion of instruction, or of exemplary character satisfies." To be sure it does; and that sense is very clear to one who is willing just to receive it. Jesus Christ is our Redeemer not by setting examples of human greatness before our eyes, but by bearing our sins upon the cross, and becoming our substitute before the divine law.

It is not necessary for us to dwell with much curiosity upon the particulars of furniture represented in the vision of Isaiah. The imagery is more picturesque than definite. Commentators have never felt rigidly constrained to tell exact localities or point out specific details so as that they might be identified. The word which is rendered " tongs " here is the same as that translated " snuffers " when the sacred writer is speaking about the golden candlestick; and among the various utensils enumerated as belonging to altars, such an implement is not in any instance included, almost indispensable as it would seem to be for use. The words rendered " live coal " mean a hot stone, so some say, for the sake of literalism, and others deny for the sake of accuracy, proclaiming that stones were not used on the altar for burnt offering. A tiresome discussion might be made over these distinctions. Isaiah has no sense of rigidity in the imagery around him; any temple, any court, any altar, any ember, any forceps, would sufficiently furnish the outline of the spectacle, so far as the commonplaces are concerned.

What he wanted to know, and what we want now to remember, is the old and unalterable announcement of the Old Testament and the New, the official proclamation of the necessity of an atonement: "Without shedding of blood there can be no remission of sin." Life must be surrendered for sacrifice on the altar, and the sacrifice must be applied to each sinner, and the seraph must bring the coal in the tongs, all this signifying that Jesus Christ is the Priest and the Victim, and that he died in order that a way might be opened for the sinner's return.

To repent of transgressions signifies far more than just to grow somewhat sorry that they chanced to get committed. It means to take these wrongs as real wrongs that we personally owned, and wrongs of which we must make quick and secure disposal. He who has but one unforgiven item of sin on his account has enough to ruin his soul. He must attack it, throttle it, kill it, bury it; and now he must flee from it as Moses once did from the dead Egyptian a man saw him cover up in the sand. And after that, he must for ever avoid the direful enemy who witnessed the deed, lest he should taunt him with the murder and betray him. No monument is ever to be lifted over any iniquity you have once renounced. Leave its very memory to rot, its obscene funeral to be forgotten, its lonely grave to remain unwatched and undiscovered. Let each wicked man be sure of one thing: that can not be a right contrition which a fitful conscience indulges, if it allows him to come back in secret to those

old associations, now and then, where he forsook his wrong-doing, and to mourn, in the half-wailing of a desolate recollection, the hour when he was compelled to bid it a reluctant farewell. He needs, as it were, to pluck out a right eye or cut off a right hand, lest his whole body should be cast into hell, in such strenuous moments as these. Of course, there is suffering in the experience. But not one whit of the anguish is ever to be charged over to the God of our redemption; it is the wages of the devil, and he pays it with particular joy when he has found out that a soul is leaving his service—pays it every farthing!

Never was a wretcheder mistake made in this world than that when any human being begins to work up agony as a satisfactory condition of pardon and acceptance with the Highest. A live coal or a hot stone or a burning ploughshare on the lips, kissed till the quivering flesh has commenced to crisp and crack, is nothing to him who has at last sought only the "touch" of a sacrifice made long, long years ago! For it is not the sinner's own suffering, but the Lord Christ's, that saves him! Isaiah learned his lesson in this vision. It was he who proclaimed to the ages the errand and the spirit of the Master who came to atone for sin. Just let a Christian read over these words of prophecy, and then think what a wonderful comment upon them was left by the life of Jesus:

"Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my Spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gen-

tiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth."

I know of only two things to do in order to recover the souls of men; and these are both in this Old Testament story we are so patiently studying. We produce conviction of sin by holding right up plainly and persistently before the world the image of Almighty God—exhibiting his perfect character and his irrevocable law. Then we secure the relief of pardon by offering, at that instant of repentance, the merit of Christ Jesus, the Saviour, in the atonement. And in all the Bible we shall not, even with much searching, find one thing more than these.

CHAPTER XV.

SACRIFICE TAKEN WITH TONGS.

"Which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar." *Isaiah vi: 6.*

We have reached the day of gospel bluster and bluff. Boisterous and sensational movements, with a glare of conspicuousness in them, and a sound of bass-drums with a twang of tambourines to give it a zest to the ungodly, are commended by bishops and prelates of high degree, for the sake of averting attention from the failure of organs, quartettes, surplices and processions, to win the souls for whose sake Jesus died.

There is room for a hint out of this for Christian workers in an uneasy age like ours, when fussy parade seems pushing forward into the place of quiet fidelity. We hear too much about sharp reminders of an unawakened man, and startling summons to a laggard one. We threaten a series of judgments in the name of the celestial powers; we seek to be witty with abrupt address, so as to shock courteous people into an edifying state of mind; we paint the rocks of summer resorts with violent texts of Scripture; we accost strangers with what we call faithful exhortation, that in the end turns out to be only uncivil; we appear

now and then to imagine that the virtue of an altar coal resides not in an attainment of sacrifice but in the stinging fire our pressure can make it leave on the lips of a penitent. Hence, much work is wasted in fuss, and reaches nothing but pain, and is lost in disgusting decent people.

Exalted by the early part of this spectacle to the highest pitch of curiosity and wonder, Isaiah, still looking upon these closing revelations of God's glory and his own guilt, is suddenly overthrown with fear; he falls on his face in the lowest depths of alarm. His reversal of feeling is unmistakable. He cries out in tones of abject mourning, "Woe is me! mine eyes have seen the Lord of Hosts! I am undone!"

Our expositions thus far have shown us two things at least: Each human being is under a curse of God's broken law, which demands an immediate atonement founded in sacrifice, and this divine expedient given to lost souls by unspeakable grace must be proffered kindly to each one in turn, and not crowded on his sensibilities as if with hot tongs.

Now, as to the first, I do not think any fair criticism for harshness or roughness can in these times be lodged. On the contrary, I am sure that present preaching is quite sufficiently light. With all due diffidence, and in the judgment of unaffected charity, I am constrained to say there is some danger of too much lenient softness in the indiscriminate proffer of just the love of Jesus. Love has no basis except law. The deeper the law-work, in my opinion, the firmer

and more enduring the piety which follows. Divine denunciations of retribution were meant to be proclaimed and heeded. There is a place in most sermons for such things as fire of punishment, and the undying worm. For God is not to be trifled with, and he is "angry with the wicked" every day. But even at the highest, this must be done gently. The touch of the coal has more effectiveness than the blister of the burning tongs. History will justify this statement. Of all modern preachers I should say Edward Payson, in this respect, was almost a model, and Paul, the Apostle, was quite. And above and beyond both stands the Master alone!

"Behold, therefore, the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise, thou also shalt be cut off."

But, on the other point, I judge something should wisely be said to those who are engaged in the tranquil work of saving sinners and of edifying saints. An intimate friend of Thomas Fowell Buxton once made the remark that "he walked on through the world like a man through the wards of a hospital, stooping down on all sides to administer help exactly where it was often more needed than understood." Surely what is most essentially necessary in any hospital would seem to be quiet nursing and quick feet. This sin-sick world is at its lowest; who is going to dispute that? It is our blessed work to right it up all we can through the gospel of divine grace. This Isaiah found out for good

in his vision; his peril was ended when his iniquity was "atoned for."

Concerning which now we learn these three lessons: Every suffering sinner knows that an atonement must have a righteous ground; that it must be rendered available to himself, and that it must prove sufficient for all the rest of his fallen race likewise.

1. Every offered atonement must have a ground of righteousness. The moment a soul is truly convicted of sin, it admits a just exposure to due retribution; still, it desires, of course, a deliverance, if such be possible. Here comes in the earliest notion of vicarious relief. If I am to seek a favor, I must have some reason for thinking my wish will be respected; and if I am a sinner and a rebel, my claim upon God is thus forfeited. But some one else may still be in his confidence and affection. So what I want is a sacrifice for sin, which will do all that a punishment of me would do, and yet avert from me my deserved doom.

The old historical incident is in full illustration of the fact: when the criminal son, condemned, reached the scaffold, a great cry for "Pardon! Pardon!" greeted the king. He came upon the field to order the immediate execution. Again the populace shouted, "Pardon! Pardon!" until the hills rang anew. Of course, now the monarch paused and commanded that the herald of the people should be heard. Once again, that clamor started: "Pardon! Pardon!" And the king answered: "Upon what ground?" They did not deny the demand; unconditional pardon has no place

in an intelligent mind. Ground of pardon they must offer, or cease that call. But they shouted still: "Pardon! Pardon! for the sake of his father's scars." And then it was announced that the criminal's old father had been wounded in war again and again for the fame and glory of the kingdom. Soon the aged man came forth; a herald uncovered his breast that the multitude might behold the scars; and the king proclaimed the pardoned son should go free.

There is a profound suggestiveness in the fact that, upon the commission of a great crime, in any community, the minds of men are unanimous in demanding punishment and reparation; offenders are chased from shore to shore. This is not revenge; none of us are conscious of ill-feeling or personal spite. Sin clamors for a most condign and swift vengeance—commensurate, unrelenting. The death of a murderer can not give breath to his victim; the imprisonment of a thief can not restore the property he stole; but the law—the law—has been broken, and the universal conscience will not be at rest till law's majesty has been vindicated, till its sacred sanctions have been solemnly upheld.

2. Nor is this all; another conviction lies settled in the human mind, just as instinctive and irrevocable as this; namely, that an atonement offered for the relief of one who has exposed himself to divine wrath must be made available to his entire necessities: God must be satisfied with it and man must find that its provisions are within reach; otherwise there will be failure.

Martin Luther once sought to expound the Epistle to the Romans; but at every attempt, he met one verse near the beginning of the first chapter, that he says frightened him. He grew anxious over it and angry at it; yet could not get beyond it. The passage which gave him the trouble, it seems, was just this:

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteouness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness."

He believed that the expression, "righteousness of God," meant righteousness of character by which God is simply just and thus can not possibly clear the guilty. Such a statement seemed, to a man like him, little more than mockery; though he had lived hitherto as morally as other people without reproach before men, he felt himself to be a vile sinner before God. His conscience answered quickly to each accusation. His loathing of any attempt at self-righteousness was intelligent and utter. Hence he says frankly that his heart secretly hated God; he blamed him for announcing a so-called gospel which took away the only mitigation of human suffering; namely, the ignorance that covered the sins, and concealed the wrath waiting for them. It seemed sad enough for the Almighty to be angry over his broken law, without

destroying our comfort by a continuous thunder of rebuke, and threat of awful retribution from a thousand pulpits all over the world.

Day and night the distressed reformer tried to get the exact meaning of the text he caviled at, so as to relieve his confused conscience. By and by he came to apprehend the vexatious verse thus; and in all likelihood he was perfectly right in his interpretation: the righteousness of God does not mean God's own inherent righteousness, but the righteousness that a man brings to God as an atonement for sin. Through the the gospel is revealed the righteousness, " which availeth with God "; the righteousness by which God in his mercy and compassion justifies us. That is, as had been written, " The just shall live by faith."

This explanation put another complexion on the matter; he found his famous verse becoming one of his firmest friends. It showed him a possible reconciliation with his Maker at once and an entire relief from all guilt; hence he writes: " Straightway I felt as if I were new-born; it was as if I had found the door of Paradise opened wide; that expression—the righteousness of God—which I so much hated before, became to me now most precious and dear, my darling and most comforting word. That passage of the apostle was ever after, to me, the true gate of heaven."

3. And then, finally, the soul demands, when any atonement is offered, it must be sufficient for all others of the race also. Our conviction is just as instinctive in this direction as it was in the former. Isaiah saw,

in the same moment that opened his eyes to his own guilt, the equal guilt of all around him. He cries: "I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." Intuitively we make common cause with the rest of our race; if I am guilty, everybody is; if anybody is to be cleared, we must all come in for at least a chance.

Thus we reach our conclusion from this study: human souls are guilty, yet there is an atonement provided which is sufficient for the whole world. This seraph comes with an altar coal to Isaiah, and lays it upon his mouth. That means that men are saved from outside—that they must receive as individuals what is provided as sacrifice for their aid—and that any one who cries, "unclean," as Isaiah did, can be cleansed as Isaiah was.

There are two words often used in the gospel for which men have greatest reason to thank God; there are none in all the revealed Scriptures more welcome and precious than their "Whosoever," and their "Whatsoever." For the first marks a free access to all persons that seek forgiveness: "whosoever will, let him come." And the other marks a full sufficiency for every one of them all who will take it: "whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you." Hence, "whosoever" is God's warden at the outer door to admit any penitent pilgrim knocking to enter; "whatsoever" is the inner servitor to conduct the admitted pilgrims to the choice of chambers for rest. Christ Jesus alone has such servants, for the Father's mansion is his.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TOUCH OF GRACE.

"And said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips."—*Isaiah vi: 7.*

It is unmistakably a relief that the seraph brings from the altar for this prostrate prophet; but we observe he has to grasp the glowing coal in the tongs. A very commonplace question, to be sure, but it is likely that most people would be tempted to ask it: If this ember taken from the flame is too hot for him to hold in his fingers, is Isaiah going to let him press it down upon his lips? Would not that give the pain which fire usually gives? Just what good would there be in that?

And furthermore, I think it fair simply to mention another interpretation of this passage. It does not seem to be any better than the one ordinarily accepted; but latterly a wider recognition has been accorded to it among commentators. Arabs in the East are accustomed now to call those oven stones, with which they bake their thin cakes of rye and wheaten meal, by the very name here translated "coal." So some say that what the seraph took from the altar was a hot stone, such as often might be found lying in the place of fire. We wonder what would be gained by such a substitution; for evidently the signification is much the same.

It is the sacrifice that constitutes the very essence of atonement, not the blocks of the hearth or pavement on which it was offered. Still, it must be admitted that an appeal of more force is addressed to one's imagination when we picture this glowing stone in the tongs approaching the bared lips of the penitent prophet. But was the intention of the messenger from God to make the penitent man suffer?

There is something very exquisite in the phraseology which meets us here. The marginal translation reads more correctly: "And he caused it to touch my mouth." The new revision stands: "And he touched my mouth with it." You will recollect that the seraph said likewise: "Lo, this hath touched thy lips." A repetition like this of a word so unusual is worth noticing. A "touch" upon the lips was certainly all the prophet was called to suffer. The burning ember from the altar is not said to have been crowded upon his flesh. And indeed, typically pictured, such pain had no value. Men's sins are forgiven, not because of what they endure, but because of what Jesus Christ has endured instead of them. Even the sharpest personal pain makes no atonement for sin.

Now we do not propose to force mere single words, inspired, as is admitted they may be, to express any more than what the Holy Ghost intended. Least of all shall we attempt to sanction a difficult opinion with nothing more than a delicate turn in a term. This word "touch," however, has in itself a rebuke of self-righteousness, by all fair exposition of the message to

Isaiah. It is the lighest verb in the Hebrew language. It is that which was used when Adam was bidden he must never so much as " touch " that Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden. It is that which always appears in the Pentateuch, as often as the Israelites are warned not to " touch " any unclean thing. And here surely the word can not signify any more nor less than that the angel upon his wings swept the fiery ember swiftly across the kneeling man's mouth.

This fact, noticeably clear, is what suggests the earliest of the two lessons I am trying to impress to-day, both of which, I assume, any careful reader would be sure to find in that significant word, given by the seraph himself to Isaiah, " this hath touched thy lips." In the merit of the prophet's permanent purification human pain was not invited to share. And the broader instruction furnished by the Old Testament and the New alike is this: the pain one feels at becoming a child of God must depend upon his own behavior, and not upon God's. It certainly has its origin in his memory and life; not at all in the divine plan of redemption. No " touch " of atonement ever scorched a repentant sinner's sensibility. It is gross beyond description, to argue that Isaiah's lips were to be blistered with the fire, and so his torment of suffering was to count as a sort of penalty for expiation. What folly to imagine that malefactors may be cauterized into purity ! Pain is an important and inalienable part of what we call consequence of sin; but pain has no reckoning whatever among the pleas God

receives from those who come to him with confession. We are never taught to cry unto him: "Forgive me, I suffer!" but we say, "Forgive me, Jesus suffered!" Repentance, I admit, is sometimes full of suffering; but I assert beyond contradiction that the Bible never says God is responsible for the anguish, nor does he enter any amount of it in his books to our credit.

That brings us straight on to our second lesson, suggested in the word "touch." I think we may see in its employment an illustration of the exquisite delicacy and gentleness of all the dealings of God's Holy Spirit with the souls of men under the plan of salvation.

Let us begin with the earliest processes of awakening conscience to its inherent sense of need. There is nothing rough or noisy in the gospel; God's voice is always "still and small." Have you ever taken notice how a judicious mother arouses her children in the morning, when she finds them, possibly, in an uneasy or unwholesome sleep? Temperament has much to do with her movements; but she performs her work with singular felicity of choice, when perhaps you or I would set the whole house in an uproar. For, you know, children do differ so much! Sometimes one of them will have to be shaken by the shoulders before solid chains of slumber are broken; but she handles him very dexterously. A livelier boy needs only that the shutters be thrown open and the great yellow light be let full in; he will do the rest himself, almost. Then the next one she has to speak to a little, and call by his

name. Most likely she kisses the baby into intelligence and lifts it up, open-eyed in an instant, under some light caresses. And now and then there is an invalid lad, among the brood, who never wants any thing more than the beloved presence bending over it; for delicate infants will smile out of sleep, so it is said, when a good mother steadily looks down on them.

You understand in all this how tact and gentleness triumph in an orderly household. Most beautiful picture here of divine grace at its work! Dispositions may require varying treatment; but each summons in its turn will resemble a seraph's "touch" on the lips of a soul.

Then, next to this in the saving of men, note how gentle is God's Spirit in the full work of conviction of sin. It is true, there are a trying class of sullen wills in this world, and there are some natures whose throes and struggles of conscience are violent and at times convulsive. But recollect it is not grace which agitates, but resistance to grace. It is the soul's sin, and not at all God's love, that stirs it so. God's will is our sanctification; man's will is rebellious.

Recall one familiar picture taken from the New Testament stories:

"And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; and wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him; and he foameth and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away; and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out, and they could not.

He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? Bring him unto me. And they brought him unto him; and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed, foaming. And Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the child, and delivered him again to his father."

Surely it is the evil spirit which brings on this conflict and does all the tearing. Jesus' rebuke does the healing and gives peace. In this vision of Isaiah God did nothing more to the prophet than simply to disclose his own perfections and make the seraphim sing. Invariably this is what the Holy Spirit does; he convicts sinners by showing the things of Jesus Christ, but considerately; he "upbraideth not."

Just so in the work of sanctification, which comes also under as easy an illustration; the Holy Spirit is always quiet and gentle. Excellences of Christian character arrive often, like the shining of Moses' face when he came down out of the mountain; he "wist not" that his countenance beamed so dazzlingly before the people. He had to go into his tent and put on a veil. "The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation," even in the individual soul. Grace is never rude nor boisterous. Tholuck, the German theologian, once said while communing with a devoted American preacher, "You speak in the English tongue of a 'subdued spirit' as the result of religion upon the human heart; a wonderfully beautiful expression; we

have no synonym for it in our language." It is grace which subdues the spirit of many a believer almost without his being aware of the change. The best sweetness of temper is oftenest wrought just by God's pure light; as the singular flavors of Rhine wines are wrought in the unconscious grapes by mere sunshine. A quiet peace lies over the vineyard, and the willing sun shines on.

Then, in arousing believers to duty, even so as to put forth the supreme strength of the new life in mighty sacrifice, how light is the touch of God's Spirit! The instant the coal reaches Isaiah's lips he receives a crucial question, which, if answered, must sweep the entire existence of this son of Amoz out into danger, toil, labor and martyrdom: "Whom shall I send?" And the renewed man unhesitatingly replies; "Here am I; send me." And yet this was the timid mortal, crushed with a sense of sin so deep that he cried out in agony, "I am undone." Now he appears brave enough to undertake any service that can be demanded!

Gentleness in behavior generates gentleness in return. "Spirits are not finely touched save to fine issues." Please look up that word "touch" in the concordance. It was because men had seen the Lord Jesus "touch" the eyes of the blind, and "touch" the skin of a leper, and "touch" the bier of the dead, and "touch" the pulses of Simon's mother in the fever, that the crowd pressed up to the Lord Jesus to "touch" him; that a centurion heathen sought only a "touch" for his dying boy; that mothers brought

their infants, and watchers their sick, for Jesus to "touch;" "and as many as touched him were made perfectly whole."

Thus, everywhere, I think, it may be asserted as a universal rule under the gospel, that delicate approaches are made, that generous respect is observed, that a charity of forbearance is exercised, so that winning of souls is the aim of the incarnation, and not wrath to come. When any man is under conviction of sin he is in an unusual condition. Inquirers ought to be taken aside. They can not be dealt with in bulk. Each should be led apart from the promiscuous crowd. Every soul's inner history is lonely and pathetic. It must be treated with care, for it is individual. Sometimes it seems as if only a seraph could understand how to handle fire, even though it be an ember from a ready sacrifice. Oh, to think how we blunderers hurry out with a flaming stone for a man's lips, snatched in a coarse grasp with the altar tongs!

I pause here. When Henry Martyn was in India he sought a religious conversation with one of those intellectual heathen there. For a while the man would not listen. Won by the sweetness and favor of the educated Christian, however, he heard him talk, and argue, and preach. At last he was saved by the skill of the missionary and the immeasurable grace of God. The brethren congratulated the modest preacher, but he gave no reply. Long afterward, it was discovered that he made upon the leaf of his

diary only a single allusion to the occurrence, the line, "I learned that the power of gentleness is irresistible."

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CHAPTER XVII.

A PERSONAL ATONEMENT.

"Thine iniquity is taken away."—*Isaiah vi: 7.*

Let us traverse this whole story once more. Isaiah's fine vision is worth a new investigation, for the sake of its illustration of the practical method it shows of dealing with the unalterable principles of the gospel. You remember that he saw the face of God in that mysterious spectacle; the sight was too much for him; he fell heavily on the ground, crying, "I am undone—undone; I am a man of shame and unclean lips; for I have seen my sins in the light of a holy countenance—even that of Jehovah; I have seen the Lord of Hosts!" And, at this desperate moment, one of the seraphim flew over to the altar, on which the fire was burning, and seized a coal from among the sacrificial embers; then, says Isaiah: "And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged."

Now I find two names applied to the same thing here: whether any discrimination is to be observed between "sin" and "iniquity" it is by no means easy to say; and perhaps it is no matter. The very important difference of meaning between the other two words, however, claims our careful notice—

those words which refer to the disposal made of Isaiah's guilt, whatever it was. For "taken away" means simply to be gone or vanished, while "purged" means to have been atoned for as a crime.

So here are two particulars of study, to be treated of in turn: first, the sin which Isaiah deplored as needing to be immediately disposed of; and, second, the thorough disposal which sovereign grace made of it.

I. As to the personal guilt of this prophet, we might as well say once for all, that there is no reason for searching up his historic record in order to settle whether he was bewailing any special crime; for his experience is only human. He states in his confession that the lips of the people about him were unclean as much as his own. So far as we are able to develop his meaning, we should say he was trying to give expression to a thought somewhat like this: in existence, sin is a positive reality, and must be disposed of before God; and in nature, it is personal, and somebody must stand behind it—hence be responsible.

In the mind of God, sin lies directly alongside of a legal enactment, and must always be judged according to the terms of a revealed law. Hence any definition of it must include that element: "Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of the law of God." Behind every sin stands a sinner: it is in a sense a calamity, but in no sense a mere calamity. It is not a peril lying around loose. God is sovereign over all the intelligent creatures his hand has made; he has laid upon us every one obligations of perpetual

duty to him, which are eternal and universal. These bore on the first man in the early dawn of history; they will bear on the last man in the twilight of doom: the enactment and the claim have both been published: so there is a perfect understanding possible: there can not be any chances for ignorance on this point. The will of God and the obligation of man to obey the will of God are co-ordinate; so all guilt of man centers in the wilful separation between these two fixed facts.

Our suffering Saviour prayed in the garden: "Not my will, but thine, be done." This is the ultimate expression of an obedience of the highest kind, furnished in an instance of the most illustrious sort. Sin exactly reverses the utterance, and would say: "Not God's will, but mine, be done." Human personality resides in *will*: if you were asked to define the word *person*, you would have to say, a person is a being with a will. Hence if a person thrusts his will across God's will, and refuses to obey a command of God, that would be sin. And a sin requires a person to commit it; and then the soul that commits it is responsible.

Now, then, we begin to understand Isaiah, when he exclaimed that, not only was he a man of unclean lips, but he dwelt among a people of unclean lips: he saw he was down under sin, and with him everybody else was down. Something must be done instantly, something must be done sovereignly, or all would be lost.

II. This brings us to our second subject of consideration, namely, the thorough disposal which divine grace made of the prophet's awful burden; there was sent to him an atonement, made by sacrifice.

But here we are met by a sudden denial of the necessity of these outcries of pain and despair on the part of so sensible and educated a man as this son of Amoz, this relative of the royal house of Judah.

There has lately been offered to the anxious world a little book ingeniously intended to settle that there is no such thing as sin; the thing which bears the name has nothing in nature, as an existence, which answers to, or defines the term as it is designed to be understood. So it is insisted that what we call sin is a mere negation. It is rather a want of something than a something. It is like cold, which is only the absence of heat. It is like darkness, which is only a deprivation of light. It is like sickness which is no more nor less than the departure or default of health. Such negations are naught in themselves except counters for ethical people to play the game of logomachy with. Sin is only the absence of holiness, and does not need registering.

Perhaps it would be difficult for any one, not accustomed to the perverse wiles and subterfuges of theological debates, to imagine what advantage could result from such a conclusion as this, even if it were established. Surely such negatives would have to be reckoned among an effective class of positives of the most uncomfortable kind in all the wretched world we

live in. For men have to furnish furnaces for cold, lusters for darkness, and disagreeable drugs for cure of illness. All are compelled to consider such absences and treat them as presences of the most forceful vigor. The worrying generations of human beings are not to be told that it is unphilosophical to shiver, to grope, to howl with pain, because these inveterate discomforts are only negatives and absences of something else. Sin may be nothing, provided the argument holds, except mere lack of holiness; and yet a race of sensitive souls will agonize with remorse, and even fall into ruin from it. To inform a traveler in a winter tempest that he need not fear freezing to death at all, for cold has no positive existence, and really consists in nothing but an unusual want of warmth—this proves nothing; what common sense is there to be found in a categorical statement like that?

The purpose of this attempt at logic can be easily exposed. The moment one can show sin to be naught—a mere negation, a term without soul, without substance, without body of its own—it is supposed that he will be able to relieve his mind of personal accountability for it.

If sin be only the necessary and organic imperfection of our humanity, men can not righteously be to blame for its commission. It is, like the cinders of locomotives, one of the indispensible evils of activity and life. Mechanical wisdom has not, as yet, found any method, by which a train on the track can be run so expeditiously, as by means of steam-power. But

all steam needs fire, and fire will start sparks. Hence our impatience will inevitably employ the perilous servant; then most of us must take our chances from the clinkers in the coal. There is one manifestation of what some are wont to call, "the total depravity of inanimate things." We are inconvenienced. Sometimes we are in danger. Often we suffer pain. But that we can not just now help. And this is the grand inference—mind you—if a man gets a cinder in his eye, it is his misfortune, and not his fault. He will twinge and perhaps call out in his agony, and you may pity his unfortunate luck; but it would be unfair to say he is guilty, it would be unjust to intimate that his pain is a punishment for something he has wilfully done.

Now the conclusion of this matter is, that since such characteristic calamities from cinders may occur, and nobody be blameworthy, so it may happen with sins; for these are incidental and necessary in any scheme of intelligent order or spiritual life between God and man.

It is enough to say, in answer to all this fine-spun logic, that it assumes God could not fashion a system of moral sovereignty without imperfection. It also leaves out of estimate and reckoning the entire office of conscience as God's vicegerent in the human soul. One might just as well break up the analogy been the mechanically-ruled world of material form, and the spiritually-ruled world of intelligent free-will. Crimes are not accidents. We can not possibly feel contrite

for chilliness; we never grow penitent over on-coming twilight; but we all do feel blameworthy over our sins, and know we are responsible also.

No intelligent man can read the entire Bible without discovering four things at once; first, that God considers sin a positive element in human affairs, to be talked about and dealt with as a fact; second, that sin is the one abominable thing God says he hates, and will heavily punish; third, that every sin is inherent in some personal factor; and he, whoever he may be, is certainly to be held accountable for every aggravation in its commission; and fourth, that Almighty God himself has provided a way by which every sinner can be relieved from the penalty of his transgressions, and graciously restored to holiness.

That is to say, the Bible, from beginning to end, is a clear presentation of the divine method of cleansing a fallen creature from the consequences of his own wicked rebellion against God who created him.

Hence it is amazing to meet grown-up men and women, who conceive they can take Christ's atonement up into consideration, like a subject of curious philosophy—a mere theme of investigation fit for some vacant hour; possibly of deep interest as a theory with many fresh arguments concealed in it; but without the least closeness of contact with one's daily life. Immortal souls there are who may propose to examine different kinds of sin with a chill casuistry, just as a chemist might try to analyze strange forms of poison; not so much with an uneasy reference to their

own danger from having devoured some of them, as with a reference to their peculiar nature, or their possible effect in aiding a criminal into the wilfulness of suicide. Now Jesus says all men are sinners; he declares them condemned already; he proclaims they are on the immediate verge of destruction; he calls upon them to make some thorough disposal of this mighty issue. And it does seem most wonderful that any persons can be found so placid and unconcerned, when such immeasurable peril is hanging for years directly over their heads.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SALVATION COMPLETED.

"And thy sin purged."—*Isaiah vi: 7.*

The great throne, high and lifted up, has passed away. Isaiah's vision has vanished; the kneeling seer has arisen from his prostration upon his face; the seraphim have ceased to sing; the flaming altar and the coal of sacrifice have gone from our gaze silently; it is as if an entirely new life had dawned over the scene upon which we once looked.

Yet we can reproduce the whole spectacle, if we try. Here again in the sanctuary, where we worship, a chastened imagination can behold a vision nearly the same, this very hour. Yonder you may almost outline the picture of the throne and the seraphim around it, where, in the reverent center of adoration, the shadowless light of God's holiness still sits waiting. Right here before him stand many souls, sinful and sore with pain, knowing they are unforgiven, admitting they are lost. When the whiteness of that ineffable purity is flashed across it, human iniquity shows at its blackest. From more than one soul we might surely expect to hear the passionate cry, "I am unclean, I am undone!" Still divine grace lingers beside divine justice. A full atonement has been

provided, and now is freely proffered to any one who will take it; but some who are guilty refuse even to accept the gift of God's pardon.

It is worth while to inquire after such a mystery. You remember the prophet had complained of his lips. Directly upon those lips, the confessed seat of evil, the coal from the altar of sacrifice was laid. There was a moment of humiliation, of shame and of pain, and then that illustrious sinner was pronounced free: "and thy sin purged."

Free! absolutely free! That one point now claims consideration. The fullness of salvation! this is sufficient for our theme to-day; it is in the fragment of announcement chosen for a text. For you have on another occasion learned, from the critical exposition of the seraph's language, that the words rendered "thy sin purged," mean atonement made effective, positively complete; and so the whole guilt vanishes away.

May we consider such a statement as true beyond any misgiving or denial? Is a sinner's justification actually finished in the first opening of grace, as it is disclosed by the sacrifice of the Saviour?

It is not worth while to speculate when we can have the authoritative decision from the word of God. In ancient times the Israelites used to respond in their public services to the priests, who read aloud to them from the inspired liturgies. So God and man appeared often to be, as it were, holding conversations together. It gives great beauty and force to many

passages in Hebrew poetry, to conceive of them as rehearsed in this kind of orderly response: God speaks, the people offer their answer; then even the doctrinal issues are rendered clear.

For example, take a verse in one of the subsequent prophecies of Isaiah himself. God is represented as beginning the conference; he is telling his pardoned people that they are released. He says: "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake; I will not remember thy sins." That announcement of absolute forgiveness has to have a response; what must the singers think of it? how will such a race understand its matchless meaning? The sovereign God declares now that he does not remember men's wickedness; what shall the people say? "Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sins. Thou hast taken away all thy wrath: thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger."

Again, in a similar passage, God says: "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud, thy sins; return unto me; for I have redeemed thee." What extraordinary figures these are!

And then the grateful singers lift their hymn of acknowledgment: "Sing, O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel."

Still, the New Testament is clearer in its enuncia-

tions of evangelical doctrine than the Old. And there we find words like these; it is better, however, to quote them as given in the more modern version: "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit." We may add further to this a new verse found in the direct connection: "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that shall condemn? It is Christ Jesus that died, yea rather, that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." Such assurances all go to show that justification by grace, when God himself works it, must be instantaneous, complete, and permanent:

"The moment a sinner believes,
And trusts in his crucified God,
His pardon at once he receives,
Redemption in full through his blood;
The faith that unites to the Lamb,
And brings such salvation as this,
Is more than mere notion or name;
The work of God's Spirit it is;—

It treads on the world and on hell;
  It vanquishes death and despair;
And, oh, what is stranger to tell,
  It overcomes heaven by prayer;—
Bids sins of a crimson-like dye
  Be spotless as snow, and as white,
And makes such a sinner as I
  As pure as an angel of light."

II. Of course, we must now take up another question, for it will not fail to cross the minds of some who are studying this vision of Isaiah that the New Testament intimates we are all to meet our sins and be judged for them at the last day. Is that the fact? Will this pardoned guilt of ours have to be rehearsed again, and that, too, in open sight of the assembled universe? Is there to be no limit of reckoning what we do, and no end of recording what we refuse or neglect to do?

Recall a single text, which has very likely become familiar with frequent quotation; the figure it suggests is singularly picturesque: "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." Cast a sinner's sins into the depths of the sea! That must mean that a man's character will be more than washed out clean; his records of iniquity will be sunk out of sight and remembrance for all time to come. Put with this what has been adduced before, and one

would have a clear right to insist that there is not going to be any such exercise at the Day of Judgment as raking up one's past accounts of transgression. In one way of looking at the matter it seems as if we might force the ordinary doctrine of complete justification by faith so far as to render it very difficult to settle what the solemn old *Dies Iræ* was designed for any way. What is the Last Day of the world expected to accomplish for the universe, or what are its purposes in the economy of heaven or hell? If any individual's sins are utterly out of reckoning, and away out of existence, down in the depths of the ocean, it would puzzle the critics to decide what such a person had to do now with a final assize which was to bring forward only the wicked to receive their doom.

On the other hand, some apocalyptic pictures are exceedingly vivid; and the main point of them all seems to be to bring to men's memories the sober fact that they certainly will have to go painstakingly over the history of their lives again in the white light of the throne of God. For example, what can be plainer than these two descriptions? "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works."

And these, likewise, are the words of our Saviour speaking in person: "For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Therefore, whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness, shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets, shall be proclaimed upon the house-tops."

It is evident that some plan of adjustment must be admitted in a fair balance of interpretation of such passages of Scripture as these, when they are seen to be so diametrically antagonistic on a single degree of variation. Mere phraseology must not be forced to the dangerous verge of contradiction, just because of tropes of speech which appeal to our imagination only. Most of these verses are rhetorical and florid with metaphor. They suggest the notion of a court-room or perhaps a forum; they certainly make us think of some process of law. In every instance the conception appears to be that believers are pardoned positively and for ever; but that their sins would have to come before God's throne at the last day for a public proclamation of pardon, a judicial declaration of the highest authority that all the atonement needed had been made in their behalf by the chosen Surety. At present Christians appear only in Jesus Christ, as criminals everywhere are in some form recognized in their advocates alone. When the Judgment trial arrives, Christ our Advocate will show himself in our places; he is going to make it manifest that he has suffered in their behalf as condemned wrong-doers; he

has paid the penalty they deserved; and now every one so redeemed is entitled to go free eternally, and testimony is to be publicly given to that effect before the universe. Then each in his turn will stand for himself and the Son of God will be our Surety. "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."

An exact illustration of this legal form of arrangement is to be seen almost every day in common life; one man becomes the security, as we call it, for another. He assumes the payment of a judgment that is lying against him. The record, or evidence, of that judgment he keeps for himself, bidding the debtor go his way and think no more about it. So far as all peril is concerned, that debtor could easily declare his debts were paid to the uttermost farthing, although he might not positively know that the notes were destroyed. He would be free from execution or arrest, however, as certainly as if his entire debts had already and for ever been cast into the depths of the eternal seas. Yet it would be necessary, at some date or other, that the business world around him should be publicly assured by official certificate that the man had been honorably released from his obligations. It would remain an indispensable legal transaction that the judgment once recorded upon the books of the court should be discharged. For this a rehearsal, not only of the sums in the account but of the facts accompanying them to be taken into consideration, would

have to be made. So perfect just now for our purpose in hand is this business illustration, that a whole verse in one of Paul's epistles is used to carry out the analogy into minute particulars, even to that final picturesque instant when a paid account is thrust over the wire in the counting-room, destroyed, in order to prove that it is preserved, kept safely to show that it is settled. The passage is fairly dramatic as the apostle delineates it:

"And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross."

Jesus Christ assumes our entire debt of sin; so he bids us never be in the least anxious about it; in all the vast future it will not, in any exigency whatsoever, expose us to his Father's wrath. But when nature dissolves with fervent heat, and the heavens are rolled away as a dark scroll, and the Son of Man shall appear on the throne of judgment, all our sins will have to be exhibited in order that the declaration shall be made, and the universe understand that Jesus paid the whole debt.

"Free from the law! Oh, happy condition!" But we must listen to the record of our lives, at the last day, in order that they may be definitely declared to be free from the law. We are for ever free from a law, the penalty of which has already been borne; and

Christ suffered a shameful death in our place. At the foot of the cross is the door set open for the sepulcher, and Christian's burden rolls down into the silent abyss. His iniquity is washed away, and his sin is purged.

CHAPTER XIX.

SOVEREIGNTY AND CO-OPERATION.

"Also I heard the voice of the Lord."—*Isaiah vi: 8.*

Isaiah mentions here that he "heard" the voice of the Lord. Yet we remember that hitherto he had said he "saw." The slight change noticeable in expression gives at least an intimation that the vision as a mere spectacle has passed away. We hear no more of the seraphim, we see nothing of the altar, the temple as a scenic picture disappears in unrecorded mystery. Out from the voluminous envelopments of smoke and shadow come the accents of human language, the sound of a Voice.

The prophet seems to have known instantly who it was that was in this sublime moment speaking with supreme authority, and assuming responsibility for the rest of the interview. It was Jehovah in person.

The doctrine of God's indisputable sovereignty may stumble proud wills, but it stubbornly sustains itself against all assault. The Almighty says, in effect: "You can be saved, but you must be saved in my way; and my way to save souls is to redeem them myself, without asking any aid from them; what you will not accept gratis you can not have at all." Now human nature does not want salvation in exactly this

manner. Such method of bestowing it seems imperious. It interferes with a constitutional desire of men to have something to say concerning the future arrangements of eternity for free-willed creatures. And so the offense of the cross has not yet ceased, and souls stand in jeopardy.

The objection urged by unrenewed hearts lodges upon just two particulars. One is leveled at the sovereignty of God in the gift of the Holy Spirit for moving on the hearts of men. The captious question is pressed somewhat impetuously: "Why is such a divine help ever withheld, if a person really desires to come to the better life? If it be true, as theologians declare, that not even the first motion of the soul can be made without this amazing and mysterious influence, and then if it also be true that God sometimes refuses to send it, how is any one to be justly held responsible? By hypothesis he can not start for himself."

To all of which there is needed only brief reply. If anybody raises these questions honestly, it becomes evident on the instant that he argues unfairly, for he himself has already the gift of the Holy Spirit that he complains is denied him, and at the present moment, at least, need not agitate himself about abstract discussions. The strange fact, plain to be noticed, is that one sometimes impatiently and bitterly insists on blaming God for not sending his Spirit when he is stubbornly resisting the Spirit with every word he speaks. Men will talk for series of years about wait-

ing for the Holy Ghost, when the serious truth is evident to others, that they are violently exerting every energy of their rebellious wills to interrupt the divine purpose of grace. Like Agrippa they prefer power to piety; like Felix they are fonder of Drusilla than of Paul. So they postpone and procrastinate, and are lost.

What makes you restless—perhaps even anxious—concerning salvation at all? What is it that stirs up your conscience when you see your wife at prayer or hear your children singing hymns? Who told an impenitent man like you that there was peril in your breaking the Sabbath or in your swearing at your horses before your boys and girls? A moment's study of the Bible would show you that God's Spirit is striving with you already! He is moving you now, exciting you, pleading at this instant with you to yield your obedience to your Maker. And this is what hushes my voice in the pulpit, and fills my simple words of open warning or tender appeal with awe while I talk to you, and sends a prayer to heaven in my own behalf as more fitting for me than speech. "O God of divine grace, keep me, poor, clumsy preacher as I am, from any mistake that may hinder *Thee* in winning this soul to heaven!"

Then the other part of the objection is this: "God appears positively cold in this sovereign independence. He does not allow even our best points to go into the reckoning. He counts me as bad as the commonest wretch. Everybody must stand and surrender, for he

never makes any terms. It does not do even the least good to do good or be good. Not a tear of one's feeling, or a shame of one's heart, or a sorrow of penitence, or a cry of deepest remorse, counts in his regard. No merit has a showing or makes any difference. If anything, the worse the offender the louder the welcome. Prodigals get the fatted calves, dying thieves receive the benedictions, and go straight through into Paradise!"

Not even to this somewhat ribald talk can I pause now to present very much of a reply. Only I deprecate one thing; conclusions must be announced slowly when one is arraigning God's way. "As for God, his way is perfect." The Judge of all the earth is certainly upon the side of virtue, and is never upon the side of vice—no matter whether morality "counts" or not. As for the rest of this statement, I judge it has to be admitted as true. This very story of Isaiah's vision has exhibited two or three chances for us to speak of God's sovereignty in saving grace; we are not at liberty to take any words back. The evangelical prophet had no ownership in the altar from which came the coal of sacrifice; nor had he any proprietorship in the seraph who brought the atonement within his reach; he could neither touch the one nor command the other. It might as well be admitted at once, nobody has any right to distribute heavenly grace or order God's angels to fetch it to men. If this seems hard sovereignty, I do not know how it can be helped.

The instance is on record of one man who drew up

the covenant of his dedication to God; and in order to make it more binding and irrevocable, he opened a vein in his arm and signed the engrossed agreement with blood drawn out from his own body. He tells us afterward how he fell into doubt of such a proceeding, and destroyed the foolish paper. For he perceived that what he wanted was God's signature more than his own. "I thought upon my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies," exclaimed the devout Psalmist. And surely, there is nothing revealed more clearly in all these "testimonies," to which thoughtful penitents ought to "turn" their obedient feet, than this: not our blood, but our Surety's, seals the everlasting covenant—not ours, but "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." No bodily mutilation, nor anything like mental suffering, nor pain of any sort or degree counts.

Here, then, we appear to have reached an absolute deadlock. The soul that has sinned, feels that it needs redemption; but it demands in its own behalf the right to have a part in the grand work. On the one hand, God sovereignly decides to save souls by free grace; on the other hand, the man insists that his endeavors after holiness shall count for what they have cost him. What is to be done in such a case? This our text answers. Isaiah says: "Also, I heard the voice of the Lord."

This penitent and rejoicing man accepts the grand and authoritative decision of his sovereign and gracious God instantly and entirely. The moment he hears

that Voice he bends his ear to listen. We have in our direct line of study the record of his action. Just now we choose to occupy our remaining space with the inquiry whether there is any openly admitted and divinely accepted field for co-operation of man with God in the work of fitting a soul for heaven. Isaiah found, the first moment he began really to listen and obey the voice of the Lord, every chance he wished. For there was the same principle underlying the entire plan of the gospel then as there was when the apostle Paul, later on in history, gave to the world and the church his famous direction:

" Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence; work out your own salvation with fear, and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure."

Two things are confounded sometimes, when conversation grows inconsiderate, or careless on such themes–justification and sanctification; and these claim solicitous discrimination always. Justification is an act; sanctification is a process. Justification is accomplished in an instant; sanctification takes a long time to complete. Justification is wrought by the Second Person in the Godhead, Jesus Christ as our Saviour; sanctification is wrought by the Third Person in the Godhead, the Holy Ghost; and in sanctification man co-operates with God at every point. Justification refers to a sinner's state before the broken law of God; sanctification refers to a believer's character before

God's standard of completed holiness. Justification comes earliest.

See this in a simple illustration. Suppose a drunkard commits a murder, is tried and condemned. He stands on the scaffold with a rope around his neck, awaiting punishment, which is death. Now, it is wished to save him, and restore him to usefulness again. What is to be done? Two things are absolutely necessary; he would have to be pardoned, and he would have to be reformed. He can be pardoned, if the governor has arrived and is willing, in less than one minute by the prison clock; a year or, perhaps ten years, will be needed to reform him perfectly. His pardon could be made absolute and irrevocable, and yet his reformation might run on almost interminably. The pardon is given by the governor alone; the reform will have to be aided powerfully and constantly with zeal and patience by the man himself. So a sinner must be pardoned by Christ sovereignly, in one sublime instant of grace—that is justification; he may require patient forbearance and much help from the Holy Spirit for long afterward in his reform, and, for himself, an intensely hard wrestle for years before he should be perfectly pure—that would be sanctification, and he would be expected to co-operate with God.

Hence we can see at a glance where work for one's holiness might be said to count, and where not. All our scrimpings, our sacrifices, our penances, pilgrimages and self-mortifications go for naught, in the end

come to feebleness and disappointment, if we attempt to reckon them as part of the atonement in our justification; Jesus Christ alone justifies us freely, himself bearing our curse and discharging it. At the time when once the draft was issued, in order to fill the ranks of the French army, one man whose name was drawn, obtained a substitute to go to the war in his place; this substitute was killed in battle. The next year a second conscription was made; the same person was summoned anew; he interposed in his defense that he had already surrendered one life for his country; that argument was admitted as valid by the emperor. One man was represented by another; so his duty was met, his responsibility was discharged in the work and death of his substitute on the roll. So the believer is said to be fairly represented in his accepted substitute or surety, Jesus Christ. There is no claim upon him before the broken law of God; he stands free, justified once for all.

CHAPTER XX.

THE VOICE OF THE LORD.

"Whom shall I send."—*Isaiah vi: 8.*

It must have been a moment of supreme satisfaction and joy to Isaiah when he heard the silence broken with the new voice, which he was ready to accept as the one whose commands he was going hereafter to obey implicity. From this time on, we are to understand that this prophet is in close companionship with Jehovah; he is, like Moses, to abide in the Lord's presence and receive all his orders from the Lord's lips: "Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me."

The form of phraseology which the voice of Jehovah employs in the two questions he puts, suggests a fresh meaning to the inquiry. We all notice that it is unusual. The change of the grammatical number, from the singular to the plural, from "I" to "us," is significant. The ancient commentator Jerome, who certainly desired to find in the Word of God whatever the Holy Spirit had put there, says he thinks there is in this passage an undoubted allusion to the doctrine of the Trinity. In the first question "Whom shall I send?" the pronoun is in the singular, because the

Deity in essence and substance is one; in the second question "Who will go for us?" the pronoun is in the plural, because the eternal Godhead has three persons in it. But this appears fanciful.

Other commentators suggest that these words intimate a connection of sympathy and interest between the speaker and his listener, that is, between God and man, both of whom have deepest concern in the proclamation and propagation of the gospel. This exposition would make these words show, not only that the divine Lord had already taken this evangelical prophet into the most affectionate and familiar association in his regard, but that also he had joined him officially in whatever organized plans of usefulness he had instituted, and this, so far as virtually to ask Isaiah's opinion about the messengers of grace he was at the moment going to commission: "Who will go for us?" that is: Who can we—God and Isaiah—choose for the ministry we shall put at work?

We can not accept this conception of the inquiry; nor is the other one we sometimes meet any better, namely, that the Almighty intends to include with himself the whole counsel of the heavenly host, speaking also in the name of such angels as for all ages have desired longingly to "look into" these things. It is likely that the earliest interpretation will prove the wisest as it still seems the best, that is, the grammatical plural used now is only what Hebrew scholars would denominate the "plural of majesty." It meets our satisfaction better to say that God means by "us"

what the earthly monarchs and princes do by their royal "we" and "our" and "us," when they speak from their thrones. They seem to be desirous to produce the impression of dignity; to wish their subjects to understand that they exalt their royalty in speech.

So we can not help thinking that the Lord of Hosts is starting an inquiry concerning an extensive plan for publishing the doctrines which have been so illustriously introduced to our consideration in the life of Isaiah. When divine sovereignty now breaks the silence with a form of question so significant, our imaginations are arrested with the new attitude, as it were, of the mind of God. The plan of salvation openly shows itself in the homeward steps of this prophet, and the sacrificial atonement is luminously figured in the coal which was reached out from the altar by the seraph for his relief. But we have moved a step farther on since then; the all-wise Sovereign of the universe seems to be seeking for a fitting messenger to bear his message to fallen men.

Let us be explicit in statement. Four things, at the least, was it necessary for our Maker to do in providing a ransom for our race in its depth of helplessness in sin; necessary, I mean, if the redemption as a fact should be accomplished at all. First, he must conceive such a plan: this he did alone in the counsels of eternity. Then, he would have to announce it: this he did in the incarnation of his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Next, he must perpetuate it: this he did by an orderly record of facts, and an intelligent

grouping of doctrines, the same to be put on the pages of an imperishable book, the Bible. After that, of course, he must publish the glad tidings throughout the world.

This is the point we have reached just now. Hence, the question arose, how was this to be done? Precisely what epoch in human history is touched by the matchless imagery of this vision of Isaiah, it is in our time unnecessary to ask; but, in the dramatic spectacle of Isaiah's vision, we can fix the date easily. The great cloud rolls into the inner chamber; the majestic form of Deity enthroned is quietly withdrawn out of sight, as if God were retiring into his own dignity of reserve, in order to commune with himself. Then Isaiah bows his head in awe as he hears that question coming out of the shadows: "Whom shall I send?" From this crisis of the grand spectacle we learn the authority, the office, and the glory of the Christian ministry, in saving the world.

There is nothing on earth sillier than the cry of "priest-craft" in the church of the living God. The Creator of this universe saw fit to commission an official class of expounders and defenders of the inspired book which contained the revelation of truth needed for the redemption of souls ruined by sin. The authority of the ministry is derived from the fact that the office is of immediate divine appointment and sanction. The name of a true gospel minister is given in the Word itself: he is "a man sent from God." There will always be some wicked enough to

deride such an instrument; the old, fastidious, artistic, polite Greeks used to call it "foolishness." Very well: the Bible tranquilly says, "It pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe." So the church is bound to keep in preparation and commission those who may be ready to discharge these same duties until the Lord himself shall come and gather in his elect, no matter what an uneasy and fretful generation may have to put up in ribald opposition.

The function and office of this ordained class of workers are also indicated in this question, when taken in connection with the whole vision which Isaiah describes. Ministers of the gospel are emphatically "preachers of the Word." It is not easy to find that they are ever anything else. They have no right to pervert their calling and try to lord it over God's heritage; it is wicked for preachers to assume honors, take titles, and create orders to which God never "sent" them.

In the New Testament God's messengers to men are called witnesses, ambassadors for Christ, pastors and teachers, evangelists, messengers of the Lord, helpers, stewards of God, watchmen, shepherds: never in even a single instance are they called priests. It was "preaching" to which Timothy was set apart by the apostolic command; that was what Paul meant by the "gift" he received "by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery," which gift he was specially warned not to neglect.

" Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. Thou, therefore, endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth, entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier."

We kindle our torches of guidance from beacons which past experience has lighted. And it must always be admitted as historic fact, not to be disputed, that those ages in which the gospel made most rapid advances in the world were the ones in which *preachers* were most active, most eloquent, most numerous, and most faithful. The periods of gloom and failure to all the people of God were those in which the energy of the ministry was dulled by earthly entanglements, when the voices from the pulpits gave way to the mumbling of the priests at the altar, when rituals took the place of sermons, when the preachers became hierarchs and stunned the worshipers by clinkings of ecclesiastical " keys." The " Dark Ages " were made dark by extinguishing the lights in the pulpits.

" Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the

ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

The real glory of the ministry, therefore, which is indicated in this vision of the prophet, is found in the message that men are "sent" to bear. It is nothing more nor less than "the glorious gospel of the blessed God." All that has been rendered perfectly clear from the beginning. There is no possible reason why the church of Christ, in its day of endeavor, should mistake its precise errand under the plan that God has framed for redeeming this fallen race. Our greatest matter of solicitude is not the rich feast of the gospel; this is God's care and not ours. Nor is the duty of selecting guests laid upon us; they have been chosen by the Holy Ghost. Not even is the change of wedding garments left for distribution in our hands; these will be found where it was long ago promised they should be provided and bestowed, at the celestial mansion where the marriage-supper of the Lamb is to be spread. Our particular task centers upon the faithful deliverance of the messages which are to be carried into the highways and hedges around us.

That is to say, these blessings of the common salvation are only (and without "keys") entrusted to our hands in order to be put within easy reach of the needy and the guilty who must have them or die. The gladdest office the human heart can conceive, therefore, belongs to us.

" How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion."

We leave our present study of this scene with an unusual content. The picture of Isaiah we have is quite attractive. His tumult of fear and contrition is over; his soul has reached its rest. Once more that pardoned man finds himself on speaking terms with God; he foresees his full reinstatement in the divine favor. We are reminded of the reconciliation of Simon Peter on the shore of Gennesaret, when, after asking him three times the terribly searching question, " Lovest thou me?" Jesus suddenly lifts him back into the apostleship, with a commission of fresh favor, " Feed my sheep!" It was the convulsion of spirit through which he had wrestled that gave to his restoration its supreme welcome. It is always so. Torn with passion and pain, one prizes the new peace.

Each of us must cry out with Isaiah: " I am unclean! I am undone! mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts!" Then will surely be sent us the lifting up by permanent grace; the gospel relief is always reached most quickly through the law-pressure of need and danger. Every soul, sooner or later, will have to learn that the true way to salvation, though it does ultimately pass over the hills of glorious outlook, winds

at its beginning low down into the valleys of humble self-renunciation, and helps to raise up the soul only after it prostrates it.

CHAPTER XXI.

VOLUNTEERS AND CONSCRIPTS.

"And who will go for us?"—*Isaiah vi: 8.*

It has been my privilege to study, in three notable instances, the working of the two forms of obtaining soldiers for the army in seasons of peril. Conscriptions and drafts have always been unpopular; press-gangs fill up the transports with malcontents that are worse than useless; such recruits only bulk the battalions with grumbling men forced under arms. But when the call rang through England for volunteers for service in Egypt, they went into the British regiments with heart and soul and loyalty and devotion, such as won the hard field at Tell el-Kebir. And when the summons came for volunteers to join the ranks at Weissenburg and Gravelotte, the towns and hamlets all over France gave a host of men so full of zeal that good leaders made veterans of them in only one summer's drill. And, who that lived in the sad days of the war for our Union here at home, will ever forget how the singing volunteers advanced upon the breastworks, "shouting the battle-cry of freedom!"

We come now naturally to the second question raised by the "Voice of the Lord," when Isaiah heard it speaking: "And who will go for us?" First, God

asked whom he should send, and now he asks who will come at his call. It is evident that the Almighty seeks for voluntary service in preference to any that should be constrained or bought with reward.

Just as a sailing-master summoning his crew points to an endangered vessel in the offing, and asks, "Whom shall I send for a rescue, when the service is as much as a man's life is worth to obey?" Then a moment later we hear him putting the inquiry, "And who will be willing to take the risk, offering to save the stranger yonder in the teeth of a tempest like this?" He could command; and his men must obey or they would be shot; he prefers and decides to invite. Or, to come nearer a parent's heart, where authority is tempered with affection, we put into use a home-figure: you know how we often ask our children, when one of the disagreeable duties of family life has to be taken up, "Who will come first in making a sacrifice?" We could peremptorily send any one of them to do the drudgery or meet the danger, in the spirit of filial obedience to our parental command; but it pleases us far more to offer a chance for some one of them to volunteer to go; willing work is best.

Now, in any such cases as these selected for our illustrations, it might be added also that voluntary service is always the truest in fidelity, the most industrious in effort, and the most successful finally in results. A child, a servant, a soldier, will invariably do better work when his heart is in it, and he has said he would take it up. Our Saviour Jesus Christ has actually put

this into the New Testament, as a principle that might be accepted in every part of Christian life. A soul that has been forgiven much will love much; and a soul that has begun to love much, will accomplish much and sacrifice much; it will be glad to break the costliest alabaster-box of affection on Jesus' head.

Here, then, is one class of persons who, whenever they hear this call, "Who will go for us?" will be sure to go: those whose sense of a new life in all its belongings is warm, and whose hearts are full of a longing love and loyalty, as they think of the grace they have received directly from the Lord Jesus Christ, whose voice they have heard speaking to them. Now there is another class of persons who are sure to be found right alongside of these: those whose confidence is profound and intelligently grounded in the spiritual experience through which God's Holy Spirit leads every one who has a right to hope he will be saved.

These have been through that experience themselves. We shall be greatly mistaken if we undertake to explain the swift acquiescence exhibited by Isaiah, for example, if we exhaust his vision upon a simple commission to the prophetic office. We are told by some scholars that the ancient Chaldee paraphrase translates the words "coal from the altar" by others which mean "a word from the Shekinah;" and so they say that the teaching of this chapter, as a whole, is that God sent high endowments of language—readiness of utterance, graces of eloquence, or fresh inspiration in argument and illustration—to fit this prophet

anew as a public minister to men. Some of the Jewish rabbis claim that what was done here was just what was afterward done for Jeremiah and Daniel, under circumstances somewhat remarkably similar. They are apt to quote the story of Jeremiah concerning some of his early agitations when he was first summoned to become a prophet unto the people of God: "Then said I, Ah, Lord God! behold, I can not speak, for I am a child. But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord. Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth."

And then they quote Daniel's explanation of the way in which his disobedient reluctance was cured and his frightened hesitation dissipated: "And behold, an hand touched me, which set me upon my knees and upon the palms of my hands, and he said unto me, O Daniel, a man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright: for unto thee am I now sent. And when he had spoken this word unto me, I stood trembling. And when he had spoken such words unto me, I set my face toward the ground, and I became dumb. And behold, one like the similitude of the sons of men touched my lips: then I opened my mouth, and spake, and said unto him that stood before me, O my lord, by the vision my

sorrows are turned upon me, and I have retained no strength. For how can the servant of this my lord talk with this my lord? for as for me, straightway there remained no strength in me, neither is there breath left in me. Then there came again and touched me one like the appearance of a man, and he strengthened me." From all this, the inference is drawn, and the exposition is made; that these instances were all alike in that the men were commissioned to an office of prophetic revelation concerning the events of the future.

Of course that is true as a fact; but this vision of Isaiah certainly had in its details more things than that, and some things which were different. This explanation leaves out of notice the application of fire to Isaiah's lips; and that appears the main thing in his case. The "touching" of the mouth may be emblematic of the work of the Spirit in the revelation of unknown truth to be communicated to men, as of course we believe it is; but the coal of fire from the altar, which is found only in the instance of Isaiah's vision, must have a direct reference to sacrificial atonement—expiation for iniquity committed.

And most of all, it leaves out of account the effect produced on the evangelic prophet; he was instantly set free from the sense, not of an awkward embarrassment as to public speaking, but of personal guilt. A significant absence of all appearance of religious conflict makes this scene we are so patiently studying very unlike these others. No allusion to penitence or par-

don through the merits of sacrifice is recorded in the narrative of either Jeremiah or Daniel. They received their "touch" from a "hand:" Isaiah received his "touch" from a "live coal."

There is no use in looking anywhere else for help, so long as this aid is offered. Some people seem to think that what is called "culture" is redemption, or at least a process toward a kind of elevation, which will amount to the same thing at last. Many a man has sometimes a real yearning desire for holiness of character, and in his better moments of thoughtful candor he actually would set about a very edifying struggle of moral endeavor in order to attain it. He resolves and proposes to lead himself up into conformity to what he imagines are the requirements of the supreme law of heaven. Now there is no use in denying a sort of respect for one who is trying to be purer and better in God's sight; these efforts cost him much expenditure of his valuable time and strength. But the trouble is, they appear to be so awkward and in the end so useless. Think of a great-minded woman like Madame Guyon, putting dry peas in her shoes and colocynth in her drinking-water, so as to get pain of discipline or bitterness of mortification! When a man struggles in this form of self-affliction, he does not seem always to be exactly on his own side. It looks as if there were pain enough in this world without deliberately fashioning any new and odd kinds of it. And then it is a little amusing—or it would be if it were not so awfully serious—to know afterward how

inconsistent are the splendors of his promises, as contrasted with the meagerness of the results; his coarse reformations are only the stirrings up of a pool without any outlet for corruption, or even any inlet for freshness in new cleansing, which a paddle might be expected to rouse in the slime lying down at the bottom. They make his whole life uncomfortable, without at all making it grow clear.

So there is a third class of persons who would instinctively respond to the question which Isaiah hears from the voice of the Lord at the end of his vision: "Who will go for us?" It is composed of sympathetic and charitable souls, that are heart-broken and tender when the poor fallen world lies out before them as the world for which the Lord of Glory was crucified. They can not bear to look upon the dreadful abasement and ignominiousness of the expedients to which ignorant seekers resort, in vain essays to save themselves from Satan and hell-fire.

Tourists there are on their travels, whom it never strikes with a commensurate horror to see human beings occupying their immortal lives with loathsome projects for obtaining a remission of their sins. Pain within, guilt acknowledged, wrath coming on, are the sights which this race of ours never fails to exhibit, when we look out on it with spiritual eyes. Sin and retribution are the two things which people dwelling on all the continents that children read the names of on the maps are striving to keep apart. For they do not propose to surrender sins, and they can not dis-

charge the sovereignty out of which the wrath keeps flashing. A penitent starts with a hope and returns with a failure ; a fresh trial may be more successful, and he pushes on. He struggles along through awful oppositions with zeal really commendable if the end were right. He mortifies his body, he tithes on his estate ; and still he gets no satisfaction. There must be a good deal of anguish when an aged Hindoo drives the iron hook into the muscles along his spine, and submits his body to be swung around overhead, hanging by the quivering shreds of his sinews. So that other operation must hurt some when the devotee inserts a bamboo stick into a hole cut in his cheek, and draws the slow length of it through the slit, until it balances nicely about the middle. Then, too, this keeping of one's hand clenched till a sharp and meritorious set of forked finger-nails force their painful advance between the slender bones of his palm out on the back side beneath the joints—such an exercise would be irritating in the heats of tropical nights. What do they do it for ? you ask. In order to atone for their sins. On the whole, if we could venture on making a choice among such disagreeable things, it would seem as if that curious undertaking of a long journey with spans of one's person, head and heels like the measuring-worm's loops across the spaces of hot road, using one's pathetic little six-feet of body as a double yard-stick along the pavement—it is likely that this would be the least wearing, and possibly the least dangerous, while as to valuable meritoriousness

there could be no real stand made beyond it. What are these poor creatures trying to do? you ask again. Their hope is, that by bribery of personal suffering, merit, in some way made up or gained by some humiliations or some agonies shown in the sight of heaven, they can succeed in covering quietly the vices they practice from the violence they fear will soon fall on them.

In our proud superciliousness we ridicule these Hindoo devotees. But are all men around us wiser than they are? The undertaker, only a few years ago in this city where we dwell, found a Protestant minister had been wearing a metal chain about his waist for years, till his raw flesh had grown callous in some spots and putrid in others; that was a fact disclosed when his form was placed in the coffin. He was literally mortifying his body in order to save his soul from retribution.

One, whose temperament is sympathetic enough to wish to interfere humanely and prevent cruelty to souls, has an almost irresistible prompting to approach such a person, if he could venture without accusation of impertinence, and say: Listen just an instant, my sad friend; there was a man once by the name of Augustine; he was very wild when he was young, and fought rather severely to be decent afterward for many years; he undertook several heroic reforms in himself; eventually he reached his peace: enthusiasts even to this day call him "Saint Augustine;" still, he did not seem to have come at his purpose in that way. For

while on his death-bed, he requested the attendants to fasten up a verse out of the Bible on the curtains, so that he might read it constantly when he happened to be awake. That verse contains old doctrine, which to some people is quite new. It was written by a king who worked up to it after many years of troubled life, and died in the hope of forgiveness: "For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt-offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

CHAPTER XXII.

HOMEWARD STEPS.

"Then said I, Here am I."—*Isaiah vi: 8.*

The earliest result of divine pardon freeing one's soul from the burden of guilt is invariably to lead a genuine believer to desire activity and usefulness. Assurance of forgiveness brings a sense of security, and there follows a readiness to do God's will, with a certain measure of modest confidence in one's ability to evince his gratitude, as soon as there is offered him a chance. When Saul of Tarsus fell on the ground, blinded by the light which flashed upon him from heaven, he asked instantly, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" So here: Isaiah was first borne down under a full sense of his own unfitness for anything holy; he felt himself unworthy even to chant God's praise with the seraphim. But now we mark how bold he has grown under the exhilarating influence of his gladness and love. When the Lord puts his two questions: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" this man rises to meet the call eagerly, "Here am I; send me!" We note with admiring interest what a sublime proffer of personal devotion he makes at once; his heart is filled with enthusiasm. The story makes us think of Bunyan's account of his

Pilgrim after the burden upon his back had rolled away down into the sepulcher at the foot of the cross: "Then Christian gave three great leaps for joy, and went on singing."

The message which the Lord wanted a messenger to carry was by no means indicated in the inquiry. The region to which the preacher must prepare himself to go was not specified. The very nature of the difficult duty was as yet unmentioned. The possible perils of fidelity had not been disclosed. Indeed, the question here recorded, as the primitive expositors assume, was most likely not addressed to Isaiah specifically, because it was intended to elicit a spontaneous offer upon his part, and so secure the affectionateness of a voluntary service. With the instant consecration of an unquestioning and happy heart, this new recruit of evangelical grace answered: "Here am I; send me!" Full devotion, absolute and grateful, was now his only purpose. No matter as to particulars; no matter when, no matter where, no matter for what; a solitary acquiescence, because embracing all: "Here am I; send me!"

They say that the Memnon statue, standing out in the eastern desert, used to sing at the sunrise: most likely all that is a fable. But there are in God's work to-day on the earth men who only yesterday had hearts of stone, and lived silent enough in the rayless darkness of eternal night. But when the dawn of the Sun of Righteousness rose upon them, with the earliest beams of warmth and brightness, they sprang up

to greet the new light with hymns of joy the most exultant that humanity could ever sing. In the spring of a gratitude, as full as if a man were leaping into service, they have cried out: "Here am I; send me!"

When Isaiah found he had come up into the very companionship and communion of God, perfectly restored to favor and within reach of fine chances for doing good to men and bringing honor to the Highest, there might seem to have been some small danger that he would wait awhile in order to bask in the sweet sunshine. We remember that, when Jesus our Lord was transfigured on the mount, and the glistering glory of divine perfection shone around that sacred crest, Simon Peter murmured in the intensity and bewilderment of his joyous satisfaction: "It is good for us to be here!" So he wanted to stay there; he actually proposed that three tabernacles should be builded to keep and entertain the heavenly guests who had come down to visit men. But there were demoniacs waiting at the foot of the hill; there was work to do for the Master and a work to do for his servants; and communion could be put off till a new rest should be prepared for disciples who could then better enjoy it.

Simon Peter was somewhat out of his head; Isaiah was in possession of all his senses. He says: "Also I heard the voice of the Lord." "Also:" this word indicates that he had done some other things before. If you look at the first verse in the chapter, you will find him writing, "I saw also." And in the fifth

verse, you will remember he adds, "Then said I." So Isaiah appears after all to have found a great many things to do. His part in this vision can not be considered insignificant. And as all the story is under our study for the sake of helpful lessons it conveys, surely there is in it no more welcome portion than this which meets our eyes now; the prophet did four things, which four things are what we are permitted to do and what every fallen sinner in Christendom is expected to do, if he would be saved. We may well seek them out, for they are the homeward steps of a soul returning to God.

First, this man says he "saw." When the vast disclosure was made directly before him and he was bidden to look at the matchless revelation of the Lord of Hosts, he did look. Anything besides would be inexplicable. You would have been scandalized, if this intelligent prophet had sullenly refused to turn his eyes toward the mercy-seat open before him. You would have been shocked to find him rejecting the anthem or the sight of the seraph bringing the coal from the altar. The vision was to be examined and studied until he knew what it meant. It is impossible to save a soul that will not look at the Saviour's face.

Then a second thing which Isaiah did, comes to notice: he publicly confessed his guilt. As soon as he saw the glory of God, and heard the song of the seraphim, he felt a solemn and overwhelming conviction of sin. Now it is possible that he might have

kept his emotions stubbornly to himself. When we observe his demeanor carefully, however, a picture of him, lying on his face in the uttermost abandonment of shame meets our eyes, and there falls on our ears the cry, "Woe is me! for I am unclean! I am undone!" That is his acknowledgment before God. The salvation of a sinner, who will not repent of his sins, is impossible.

Next to this, the chief of all the homeward steps is taken when passively and humbly, without any extenuation or excuse or apology, he accepts the offered coal of sacrificial atonement upon his lips. Here at the supreme height—the last degree and the absolute culmination—of divine sovereignty, he takes what the Lord sends him; he trusts God.

Only one thing more remained; that was natural and easy the very moment he heard the Lord asking for helpers in the saving of others in the same bondage of sin and death from which he had been rescued. The man made an immediate and loving consecration of himself to obedience. Sadder work was never given to any living being to accomplish. It almost demoralized Isaiah himself when he learned the errand on which he was to be sent forthwith. He cried out in dismay, "O Lord, how long!" But he went straightway to his task; he continued in it; he took it up grandly, standing in dauntless manhood and the serenity of his faith.

Now, I do not think we need to say that Isaiah was not an evangelical believer previous to this vision. He

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appears to have been before very much the same sort of worker as we shall find him hereafter. The spectacular rehearsal of his experience looks to me more like a panorama of grace—the traverse of a soul over the track of homeward steps he had taken at some former period of his history, as a Christian goes in our time under the prompting of God's Spirit when some crisis meets him with the demand of intenser self-examination and a fresh resolve.

It is the picturesqueness of the scene in the temple which fixes the impression on his mind and heart more deeply, and that is what also constitutes the profitableness of it for the use we now make of it. These four homeward steps are those that a sinner needs to take when a call is addressed to him to come to the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved.

First, he must become intelligent. He will have to study and be prayerful, humble and docile. The incarnation of Christ, his character, his work and his office, will have to be learned to some extent or he can not be cleansed from his sin. God is not now presented in grand visions in the temple or out of it. But truth is God, and holiness is God, and Christ is God; and so, in one sense, God sits high and lifted up daily in full view of the Christian world. Every evangelical tract or book or sermon proposes to reproduce Isaiah's whole vision. But if ungodly men wilfully refuse to look at it, what good will it do them?

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that

whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."

If bitten men would not look at the serpent, who was to blame? So God now speaks out of heaven, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else." But if inquirers wilfully refuse to look, what more remains to be said by men or God?

Another homeward step, then, for each sinner is this, he must be penitent. It is of no use to interpose that one cannot crowd his conscience; he may pelt himself, or be pelted by others with accusations of guilt, and yet if his heart and will do not admit the charges, mere confession by words do not count, and he can not compel heart and will. For the moment any one adequately conceives of God's holiness, his own conscience will assuredly disclose its unworthiness. You may sometimes be able to conceal your experience, but your gain will be slight in the delay; ultimately you must own the guilt, admit the ill-desert, and then cast yourself on the grace of the Saviour, or you are lost.

"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy."

The third one of these homeward steps is this: acceptance of the pardon offered by Christ. You want something that will give your soul peace and rest; nothing but an absolute satisfaction of the law of God which has been broken can assure you of this. If you

had a case waiting for trial in any earthly court, and in a moment of perilous crisis an eminent advocate offered to help you, your instinct would be to accept his aid gratefully. If you were overboard in the water, and only a plank were pushed out to your side, you would gladly throw your arms around it. If you were at the point of death by accident of poison, a physician standing near would not have to wait for you to *let* him save you. Oh, I do not suppose there is anything else in the world which a man would put in jeopardy so recklessly as he would his immortal soul! Why! some men will not even *let* their souls be saved by God in person!

Obedience is the very last of all these steps homeward. Through this entire line of return it has passed until now it has attained its rest. All these things any man can accomplish with the aid of the Holy Spirit; you can study and pray; you can repent and confess; you can accept and believe; you can obediently look up and say: "Here am I!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

PERSONAL SERVICE.

"Send me."—*Isaiah vi: 8.*

It grows more and more mysterious, the more widely we study this spectacle, to find the prophet Isaiah so crushed, one moment, so prostrate and so humble, and the next moment, so elate and bold in his offer of himself as the messenger of the Almighty. "Send me!" Just now we heard this man crying out: "Woe is me! I am unclean! I am cut off!" Here we meet him looking straight up into the face of God again, without one tremor of alarm. If he had to say anything in answer to questions which were not addressed to him as an unclean and lost soul, why did he not point out the seraph standing there before his eyes, the fiery singing creature who had lately brought the altar coal to his lips while the others were making the temple ring with the anthem! "Send a seraph!" But no: "Send a *man!*" he cried instead: "Send *me!*"

Enough has been said already to show that the wisdom of God, when he was ordering the plan of redemption, chose to promulgate and publish its provisions not by angels but by human beings. Great things are in all cases very simple; prudence is often mani-

fested in one's selection of instruments free from intricacy and facile of employment. Diamonds must always be polished by diamond dust. This fallen world upon which the gospel is to act must, in a certain sense and to a certain extent, polish itself into brightness with the dust of its own ruin. We often pray that the spirit of divine grace would "come over the mountains of our iniquity;" but this sin-cursed race of ours is not a solid mass of mere matter; it is not a mountain of ruins, like the debris of a burnt town, to be dug over and graded off with scoops and shovels, manned by plodders and ploughmen. It is a breathing aggregate of souls and bodies, living and in pain, crying out unto God and man for help. It has to be dealt with by those that understand it and appreciate it and are attached to it lovingly and sympathetically. It may need force at exciting crises of history, but what it needs oftenest is ingenuity with adroit tenderness and patient endeavor to turn it over to good. There are human passions and appetites and wills which must be rubbed skillfully against other wills and affections and tastes, moulded and fashioned under the leadings of God's Holy Spirit. Never was a wiser or a welcomer decision made than when the Supreme Head of the universe decreed that he would not give the evangelical restoration of this world to angels, but to men. But how weak and insignificant seemed the plan!

Who would think, from the first view of the vast work to be done, that the best form of procedure in converting the nations would be the establishing of a

mere band of preachers, who should go around the wide country with a simple story of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God dying on the cross in Jerusalem, so as to be a Substitute for sinners!

The Jews—what did they think of it? To them it was never anything but a "stumbling-block." What did the Greeks think of it? They were the great scholarly people, who called it "foolishness." Even the disciples of our Lord could hardly keep from thinking that it would be better to go into the schools of disputation and reason with the leaders of public opinion; it seemed waste of time and breath to stand out upon a hillside, or a rock, or a boat on the border of a stream, and talk to the men, women and children. There can be no doubt that the logic of the new preachers would have scattered into threads upon the air an infinity of gossamer webs of speculation. But that would not have met one single want of any soul, famishing with the hunger of sin, any more than it would to have gone through the streets of Antioch, brushing off some cobwebs from the shade trees, in order that the lepers might cease crying out "Unclean! unclean!" The scriptural plan went straight down to the people. The life of our divine Saviour was only the story of a wandering rabbi, an itinerant exhorter and teacher. On the mountains, over the valleys, and along the water-courses, he scattered abroad the bread of truth as the food for the souls he found. And while some argued and some reviled, "the common people heard him gladly."

There is nothing surprising in this success. The economy of the ministry is one of its best recommendations. One voice can reach five or ten thousand hearers at once easily. Much aid is received from the mysterious magnetism of large crowds. Sympathy is created by the emotion of a human witness who has himself felt the power of the truth he proclaims. Immeasurable advantage is given to any speaker to have his convictions drawn from an experience that has enriched his whole life. How small a capital, both of means and men, such an organism requires! How finely it illustrates the principle of division of labor likewise! These are some of the commendations which this plan of grace deserves.

But now we must be careful lest we lose the value of these lessons by making a foolish and hurtful mistake. The work of converting a vast world like this is not to be considered as laid upon the ministry alone. That is not the meaning of the office; *every believing man has to be a minister or a missionary.* When the Voice of the Lord put that question, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Isaiah was perfectly right in answering, "Here am I; send me." I think this duty is recognized throughout Christendom; it needs no argument here now. But the lamentation has been raised lately, rather seriously, that the whole church of Christ is falling behindhand, because of the lack of personal effort for souls on the part of its members. It must be admitted that there is some cause for solicitude. New organizations are proposed

in place of the organized bodies of believers, whose steeples point toward heaven and are the landmarks of past ages. New forms of activity have been gaining confidence, which differ in no respect from others, except in the feature of being out from under church control. And the reason for this has been publicly stated: " The whole Church has become Laodicean, and the Lord has long since spewed it out of his mouth." Such a speech is not cheerful, not decorous; it is not charitable. It is not true, either. Nor has anybody reported that much good was done by it.

It does not appear to me that the backwardness in these respects is owing to any wilful rejection of personal service as a duty on the part of Christians. Most of all the church members I have met in more than forty years of continuous ministry have averred their willingness to be active and alert, as well as acknowledged their obligation.

I cannot think that the lack of zeal is owing to the sudden want of gifts for evangelical work among church members. Why ! these active people I see so busy around me are all church members; only the badges they wear do not mention where they go to communion. Christian people are intelligent as ever they were, so far as I see. Moreover, there is plenty of money; there is opportunity for usefulness; there is " scope " too, as it is called in the pamphlets that reach me by mail. I am not going to admit that unusual torpor and backsliding have made believers worse than they have ever been; for as I write the air is buzzing

with the sounds of a convention of forty-thousand church members who are in earnest debate as to holding the next annual meeting in Australia! An enterprise like that does not argue much torpidity. The clergy at all events are lively; the convention is full of them. There is no charge of harshness of the pulpit; indeed, hearers say less than they used to say about the clergy being to blame for "nagging" cultivated people on Sunday. If one is really honest now, he will be obliged to confess he cannot give a satisfactory reason why the churches are complaining and the boards are getting into awful debt and the activities of most congregations are exhausted in channels outside of the regular call.

The theme of our present study, however, affords some suggestive hints that may help. Look carefully at the exact phraseology which Isaiah employs: "Here am I; send me." He says he will go for the Lord, but the Lord must *send* him. We remember one incident in the biography of our Saviour, when he was about to feed the five thousand on the hill beside Lake Gennesaret. He sent his disciples for food, and they soon secured five loaves and two fishes which a little lad had brought with him in his wallet. The amount was so small that they entered a deprecation and an apology for the scantiness. But Jesus only said to them, "Bring those to me!" He did not say, "Give them to the multitudes and so feed them;" but, "Give them to me, and I will see to the feeding of the hungry hearers." That was what made the miracle. A

like suggestion in this reply of Isaiah shows the force of his entire ministry. A true believer brings his personal service in bulk, as it were, directly to his Lord. This evangelic prophet makes no mention of any choice of field or fashion of labor; the Lord's voice is to order his course.

It seems to me that the trouble in our time is found in the mere slip-shod forms of inquiry after spheres of activity and kinds of religious effort. The secret of one's content as well as success is found in God's choosing and commissioning and directing him; he must ask divine counsel; when it comes, he must accept it without one question more. Christians are not ingenious at getting into their proper places simply because they fastidiously seek to follow their own tastes in an agreeable employment. They have all the zeal of the apostle Paul when he assayed to go into Bithynia, and they have nothing of his amiability when the Spirit suffered him not. Many a worker grows unduly excited as Barnabas was when Paul showed him his duty, and the young helper preferred to have his own way and so got up the quarrel and sulked. I have known a maiden lady of mature years to grow fairly tempestuous, because she could not have the infant class to teach; she left the entire Sunday School, and became a " Daughter of the King " instead. I have seen a younger girl flash into irritableness because the chorister put what she thought was her " rich alto voice " on the soprano; she forsook the choir and went into the mission school of another church where she

broke her covenant relentlessly for three melancholy years. Such persons get to believing at last that "the whole church is Laodicean, and God has spewed it out of his mouth." These were not cold, but hot.

It is time for us all to stop searching for the things we *cannot* do: that list with some is large already. A hasty man commits himself sometimes before he has tried. Moses had an unseemly contest with his Maker once on the matter of his aptitude as a public speaker, and even Aaron's presence with him, going to do all the oratory, could not keep him from growing sullen. But as soon as they reached Pharaoh's palace it was Moses who took up the public addresses for a business, while of his brother the wisest record made is, "And Aaron held his peace." It might as well be stated here at once that the most hopeless cases that the church has ever to deal with are those who "could not possibly do" *this;* or those who "have no adaptation for" *that;* or worst of all, the crowd of those who confess that *this* "is not their favorite cause."

Look over the wide fields, and carefully note how varied are the forms of personal effort. Is nothing within your reach? Have you soberly asked God whether *he* has anything for you to do, with the solemn promise beforehand that you will leave him to select for you? A great king would build a cathedral, so runs the story; and in order that the credit of it might all be his own, he forbade any one to contribute in the least measure to its erection. A tablet was placed in the side of the edifice, and on it his name

was carved as the patron. But on that night he saw in a dream an angel who came down and deliberately erased the inscription, and placed the name of a poor widow in its stead. As he gazed this was three times repeated; then the enraged monarch swiftly summoned the woman before him and demanded, "What have you been doing, and why have you broken my commandment so?" The trembling villager replied: "I loved the Lord of Glory, and longed to do something in honor of his name and for the building of his church; but I was loyally obedient to my king also, and he said I must not give money for the stones to go into the cathedral. So in my poverty I brought a wisp of hay for the horses that drew the stones and sometimes stopped before a corner of my wall; I do not think any one knew that I did it." But it was the dream which made the monarch to see that he had been in dreadful fault himself; for his labor had been only for his own praise, but the humble widow had tried to make known her love for her Lord, while, at the same time, she had kept the faith with her king. And he ordered the woman's name to be inscribed upon the tablet beside his own.

Just let us keep saying over and over again this reply of the evangelic prophet: "Here am I; send me." Are teachers in demand? "Here am I; send me." Are tract-distributors wanted? "Here am I; send me." Do sick people need watchers? "Here am I; send me." Are the poor out in the slums famishing? "Here am I; send me." It is all wasted

time, for you or anybody, till the Lord sends you, and till you go where the Lord sends, without asking any questions or making any replies.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PROPHETIC COMMISSION.

"And he said, Go." *Isaiah vi: 9.*

The answer to Isaiah's prompt offer of himself to the call of the Voice from above does not seem to have been delayed for so much as even the next instant: "Send me!" cried the preacher: "And he said, Go!" reads the record of acceptance; and now the biography is fairly begun.

It is time that this remarkable man, most remarkable for his individuality above any other characteristic he possessed, should be introduced into our study of this chapter as a man. We have already attempted to draw one picture of him, as he appeared in the year that the leprous king Uzziah died, and have made some allusions to the work belonging to the period before this vision occurred. But now there is a fresh character taken on by him, of more intense importance and of far greater help to the students of New Testament revelation of doctrines. It cannot fail to be more useful to us to understand his personality.

There was a time when Sir William Herschel was engaged in the orderly study of the planets, one by one, and then the fixed stars. Evening after evening he turned his attention to the skies, expecting always

to find some new revelation of shining splendor. Of one occasion in particular, he records a unique impression: "I felt," he says, "after a considerable sweep through the sky with my telescope, Sirius announcing himself from a great distance; and, at length, he rushed into the field of view with all the brightness of the rising sun, and I had to withdraw my eyes from the dazzling object." This remark of the astronomer is quoted by one of our modern critics of the "Bards of the Bible." He applies the incident as a figure of his progress in reading, as he had to read, the history of Israel or Judah alongside of the biography of each inspired poet whose strains he was enjoying. He cries out in enthusiasm as he describes the approach from a great way off of Isaiah, the "mighty orb of song," rolling near to his "specular tower" till the splendor of his illustrious life dazed him "awe-struck in the path of his coming." There can be no doubt concerning the positive supremacy of Isaiah as the evangelic prophet of the Old Testament.

For one thing, in this picture we now try to draw, we must notice this man's eminent devotion. He was absorbed in his calling. In each word and act of his life, the one purpose he put forward, the errand he came on, was held out distinctly. In the midst of almost universal abasement he stood erect. When there was defection everywhere he meant to be true. There was unusual religious depression over the whole nation. This might have been anticipated. For

hands that are occupied with taking bribes and following after rewards, till their owners have grown venal, rebellious, and companions of thieves, cannot be expected to hold out humble palms for the divine riches. Feet which walk mincingly as they go, tinkling with ornaments around the ankles, will never be swift to move on errands of peace and mercy for the Lord's sake. Hearts, which are wholly absorbed thinking about "wimples and crisping pins, rings and nose-jewels, hoods, veils, bonnets, bracelets and mufflers," are not to be relied upon, as prayerful and devoted messengers of divine compassion to the sinful and lonely. In those indolent days of wealth and self-seeking, there can be no question, there was a deep lack in love and zeal for the Lord of hosts. A cold formalism forbade hope of any penitent return to God's work. A proud indifference, more like apathy or what physicians call atrophy, had fallen upon all kinds of public spirit in relation to each interest, civil or religious. As yet, however, there was no actual outbreak of divine wrath. There was no melancholy voice in the street crying woe or presaging doom; Isaiah was there, to be sure, and the Prophetess did her duty; so did the two boys with their quaint long names. But the nation soon learned to get up a hearty laugh about that family every time they came into sight.

For another thing, therefore, in this picture of the prophet, we must notice his consecration. Isaiah knew that such defiances of universal, eternal, bed-

rock law in the kingdom of Almighty God could not be suffered to go on. The entire atmosphere was murky, and sulphurous with warning, like the air of a hot summer afternoon, just previous to the crashing of a thunder-storm. Each spiritually-minded man, even if borne down under its force of heavy gloom, felt that vengeance was already on the way; the Lord of heaven would be heard from before long.

Isaiah appears to have perceived that he would now have actually to sacrifice everything for this wicked people. He must be content to render himself ridiculous, if needful, in order to win their attention to his rebukes and warnings. Students of history, sooner or later, seem to remember the enumeration of Pythagoras as he was wont to trace that familiar series of evils which ultimately destroy a doomed state: "The first thing," so he said, "is luxury, the second is satiety, the third is insult, after which comes ruin." Against the popular defection Isaiah set himself with all the energy of his great nature. This son of Amoz might have written across his whole history the words of the later preacher Paul: "This one thing I do." He chose a single theme persistently, whether men would hear or forbear: "Cease to do evil; learn to do well." This demand, as if from high heaven, he went over with day after day. He chose short words with a rhythm to them. He became now and then what we should call sensational. He began that year to dress emblematically. Like John the Baptist, who came long afterward, like Elijah the Tishbite, who went before,

he put garments of sackcloth upon his loins. This being the recognized symbol of repentance then, he made the bystanders know his message before he delivered it; the sight of him said it even to their dull consciences: "Turn ye from your evil ways, for why will ye die!" And if any one asked him for particulars, it was quite likely he would tell him some terribly unpleasant truths and leave the impression on his mind that he and his family were seers: "Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them! And the harp, and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands. Therefore my people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge: and their honorable men are famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst. Therefore hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure: and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth, shall descend into it. And the mean man shall be brought down, and the mighty man shall be humbled, and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled: but the Lord of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness."

Reiteration of messages unwelcome as this, soon provoked some enemies he made to ridicule his literary style, they said of him sharply:

"Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom

shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little and there a little: for with stammering lips another tongue will he speak to this people."

The sarcasm of this description of Isaiah is of course made venomous by the implication that he never had anything of doctrine in his speeches to say, other than that which might be better addressed to an audience of little children just weaned. But the laughable spite of a criticism like this, so scholars have long insisted, can be detected a great deal more keenly in the words chosen in their own tongue, when an uneasy set of gibing Hebrews thrust out their cheeks in their hissing. The very sound of the short sentences is full of contempt. "*Tsav la-tsav-tsav la-tsav-kav la-kav-kav la-kav-ze-ir-sham-ze-ir sham.*" But to these shafts of ridicule Isaiah gave no reply; simply over and over again he declared that this was his errand from Jehovah. They might be helped by his counsels, if only they would listen:

"To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear. But the word of the Lord was unto them, precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken."

Such a preacher, so truly absorbed in his calling,

could afford to say what he said so as to be understood. But in no instance did he change his note to please his mocking hearers; he patiently went on, devoting himself, body, soul, spirit, wife, children and life, to his God.

For the third and crowning thing, then, in this picture of Isaiah, we are to notice his evangelicity. From the beginning of his history to the end of it he is always "the evangelical prophet." He positively grows evangelical under the pressure of those discouraging days of discipline and gloom, as a flame seems to grow more luminous in the lantern of a lighthouse when the tossing ocean grows dangerously darker under the tempests. His hope shines out in the sky as a hope to be realized only by and by. No writer of the Old Testament has been more significantly quoted by our Lord and his apostles in the New than this prophet who was sawn asunder in the valley of the Kidron. Surely not one of them all was ever more moved and swayed with the true spirit of the gospel. It was made his chief office to predict the coming of the Messiah's kingdom in terms more glowing than any others ever employed, before his time or since, not only as the King in Zion, but as the Son of Mary and the Redeemer of men. The actual incidents of Jesus' crucifixion, even the details of his burial, the purpose of the atonement, a sacrifice made possible, the reality of the Saviour's acceptance as an authorized Substitute and Surety for sinful man, these facts and doctrines come down to us from the remote period seven centuries

before a song of the angels in the air had told the glad tidings to human ears. The principles of the faith once delivered to the saints are put forth as clearly by this prophet as ever they were afterward by the theological apostle to the Gentiles in the epistle to the Romans. It is, perhaps, not too much to say that, if the New Testament were lost, a helpful gospel for sinners' salvation, available and clear, might be easily compiled from the chapters Isaiah has written. The more extensively we read, the more lustrously upon our imagination shines the vision of this far-seeing prophet, looking across the ages, and periling everything he owns or loves, or longs for, in one grand venture of faith in the Saviour he foresees, the Messiah of Israel and the Christ of God.

We leave him thus standing, for the look of him is grand and fair for the refreshment of tired eyes. But now for our main lesson of instruction; what are we to learn from the tale of such a man's devotion, consecration and evangelicity? The answer is easy: my story is my argument; such an illustration constitutes my appeal. This son of Amoz, hitherto unknown, comes to the front "every inch a man." A strong arm stooped down to save him, to crown him, to hold him and use him for an illustrious help and cheer to the world; thus he went onward satisfied and singing. There is room for another such a man, for more than one. It is this prophet who says these great words from the God above: "Behold the day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce

anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it. For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine. And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir."

CHAPTER XXV.

A PROPHET IN HIS OWN COUNTRY.

"Go and tell this people."—*Isaiah vi: 9.*

When Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord speaking in this peremptory manner he answered with immediate obedience. He started from the word "Go!" But the "people" to which he was commissioned was his own. "No prophet is accepted in his own country," said Jesus Christ of himself. Isaiah was a living proof of what our Lord testified: a prophet hath no honor in his own country; and yet it was to his own country he was sent. So we are to expect that the story of his life will be sad.

Moreover, the nation was at that particular date in a singularly unfortunate condition. The old adage, "Like people, like king," never found a more vivid illustration than a nation so confused as Israel at that crisis could easily furnish. If you would learn their real state at a given time, you have need only to ask who was then on the throne. For good or for ill, the sovereign always swayed and moulded the kingdom; he was their father, or their fate. Four names are along in this line; Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. The plain characteristics of the entire period will be best seen and described by means of a glance

at each reign in turn. Uzziah was a leper; we know his hard history.

Next to Uzziah came Jotham, his son. He had already been regent for a while, during the disability of his father. Six brief verses of record are all that the Chronicles assign to his reign. He "did right in the sight of the Lord:" his Hebrew name means "Jehovah is upright." But there was one thing in which he was lamentably a failure; the high places of idolatrous worship "were not removed; people sacrificed, and burnt incense still" upon the altars of the idols which were no gods.

Ahaz came then to the head of the kingdom; his name is as familiar and as hateful as was that of Nero in the annals of Rome; for sixteen years awful wickedness was at its height, and ran riot in the Israelitish realm. With a blasphemous daring almost unparalleled, this boy of twenty summers in age was able to prove to the eyes of the melancholy people, that, though young in years, he was old in rebellion against God. His brief name means "possessor," and he behaved as if he owned the land and the citizens of his country; he admitted no counsel over him but his own perverse will. He suffered no call of God's prophet to sound in the palace; he obeyed no requisition of the law. He sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree. At last he actually shut up the house of God. The whole temple service was violently stopped; and this king proceeded to introduce idolatry everywhere, going so far as

even to alter the sacred edifice so as to adapt it to the forms of the Syrian religions, which he peremptorily commanded the worshipers to receive. The annals tell us that he drove his own son to pass through the fires of Moloch, and that the nation grew wild and scandalized almost to desperation.

Nor in morals only; in political importance, too, the kingdom lost grade; Ahaz voluntarily made himself tributary to the Assyrian monarch, because he was too luxurious and too cowardly to fight his own battles for resistance. And then he shut himself up with the wizards and necromancers, who became insolent, as the royal counselors and confidants. The sin of the court was undermining the organic life of Judah. Then, as in one of the most insidiously mortal of all the diseases men know, the hectic flush proves, by even its fitful beauty, the certainty of a rapid decline, so here the very fashion of religion, manifested in the mere show of a heartless formalism and practiced by a few mocking bigots out of the thoughtless many who cared naught and believed nothing, evidenced the swift approach of the nation's dissolution. The worship of those days was only the morbid flaming of a ritualistic service all the more brilliantly delusive because it was burning fast out into the gloom of a spiritual death, sure to come over the whole land of Judah. Thus did Ahaz shock and shame his subjects, and as far as was within a single king's power, ruin all chance of progress in the realm he ruled. And when, after so wild and wretched a reign, he died detested, the degraded nobles

had still dignity enough left to show their contempt for his career by refusing him a burial in the sepulcher of the kings.

An abrupt change is made apparent just here in the history of the times. The good Hezekiah came as the next monarch to the throne. For such a day of darkness he was eminently one of the children of light. He altered at once the whole policy of the kingdom. Reversing all his baleful predecessor had done, he soon had the temple-service once more in use. Again the glad remnant of faithful people began to sing their penitential psalms in the house of the Lord. The villagers started to come up to Jerusalem for the solemn feasts. The vestiges of idolatry, the shrines, the pictures and the images, were destroyed—actually in this instance flung ignominiously into the sewer-like waters of the Kidron. Even the old brazen serpent of Moses which had been uplifted as one of their sacred memorials of an honored past, ever since the times of the lawgiver himself, was now taken down, lest the adoration due to Jehovah alone should by mistake be paid to it. The result was salutary in every direction. Beautiful as a hymn reads the old Chronicle:

"And all the congregation of Judah, with the priests and the Levites, and all the congregation that came out of Israel, and the strangers that came out of the land of Israel, and that dwelt in Judah, rejoiced. So there was great joy in Jerusalem: for since the time of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel, there was not the like in Jerusalem. Then the priests, the Le-

vites, arose and blessed the people: and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to his holy dwelling place, even unto heaven."

In his History of Literature Frederick Schlegel has written some very suggestive sentences which receive excellent illustration from an easy study of this recuperative period in Hebrew nationality; he seems to be speaking of the reminiscences that come down from an eminent and honorable past, and he says: "Such national recollections, the noblest inheritance which a people can possess, bestow an advantage beyond all other that riches can supply; for when a people are exalted in feeling and ennobled in their own estimation by the consciousness that they in ages long gone by have been illustrious—that these recollections now come down to them from a remote and heroic ancestry—in a word, that an undoubted and worthy national poetry of their own belongs to them, we are willing to acknowledge that their pride is reasonable, and indeed, they are actually raised in our eyes by the same circumstance which is giving them a legitimate and enthusiastic elevation in their own."

This is what gives us an explanation of the rapid recuperation a reader, however cursory, cannot fail to observe in the history of Judah, the moment Hezekiah received the scepter. Old memories swept over the minds of those who recalled the earlier and better years. Of course a fresh exhilaration started a new industry. The affairs prospered with vigorous advances, as the thrifty patriots came back to their de-

votion and penitence, and began to seek diligently for the former paths which their fathers had followed and the wiser ways they had pointed out.

But externally there continued to be felt the effect of all that iniquity and all that cowardice of which Hezekiah's predecessors—especially King Ahaz—had been guilty. Some men there are who are wont to deride the doctrine of a retributive providence because it is stated that the sins of the parents shall be visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. The history of Judah during these days is certainly calculated to deepen the conviction that this statement announces one of the recognized principles in the divine arrangement for governing the world. Take a single illustration here.

It has already been stated that Ahaz had made himself tributary, and pledged the nation to an enormous sum of money to be paid annually to the king of Assyria. But Hezekiah instantly threw off this burden, the moment of his accession to power. Shalmaneser, the monarch of the empire at the time, forbore to contend with him about the matter; but, when this ruler died, Sennacherib, his son and successor, determined—with perhaps a shrewd notion of conquering the entire land—to insist upon the yearly tax, as well as upon the payment of arrearages due. He soon avowed it as his purpose to subjugate the insurrectionary tribes and annex their possessions to his empire. For years he labored to raise an army, and at last went forth on his warlike errand. His progress as a

conqueror was a decided triumph from the start. City after city opened its gates and gave itself into his hands. The king of Judah fairly trembled for his throne. Finally, only Jerusalem was left, and trains of siege-enginery began to arrive in the plains all around the devoted town. Hezekiah sent out an humble embassy, offering to pay any sum of money demanded as an indemnity if Sennacherib would withdraw from such a project and leave the capital undisturbed. The Assyrian captain appeared to hesitate in reluctance, but at last asked for three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. This almost fabulous amount of precious metals was raised for him —about two million dollars in our modern currency. But Hezekiah soon learned to put not his trust in princes; for the moment the ransom was received on came the troops as before; the army invested Jerusalem, and pocketed the money, and in an hour after sent a messenger to say that the city would be destroyed at once. Hezekiah took the letter and laid it before the Lord in deep desolation and alarm; sent for Isaiah to come and counsel him. The amazing strength of the foe was disclosed by the reach of the camps out just beyond the walls. The soldiers paused for rest at evenfall, only waiting for the morning to come when the attack would begin. So those broken-hearted people kept at their prayers while the crisis lingered.

At this supreme juncture of affairs, Isaiah comes suddenly to the front. Imminent as is the danger,

he is still undaunted in his cheerful reply to the king. He assures him that the city shall not be taken by the army around it; nay, he goes so far as to declare that these soldiers shall not even attack the outermost posts. And what makes us glad is the lofty stand this prophet plants his prediction upon; Jehovah himself is in the fight, and that because of his own kingdom and a " remnant " of believers who shall be saved by Jesus. Here is the evangelic prophet still demanding a hearing, when he claims that all things in divine providence work into all things in divine grace. Read these words, as they are written down by Isaiah himself in that hour of need:

" And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward: For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and they that escape out of mount Zion: the zeal of the LORD of hosts shall do this. Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the LORD. For I will defend this city to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake. Then the angel of the LORD went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred and fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses."

The scene thus presented before our imagination of a hundred and eighty-five thousand men, all adults, all trained soldiers, slain in a mysterious midnight by an invisible and inexplicable visitation of the Almighty, and lying out in the dawn without a voice to tell the story, silent in the awful doom of the divine retribution, has always arrested the attention of the students of the Bible. It has a place in literature likewise, perpetuated by the genius of one of Britain's poets:

"The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

Like the leaves of the forest, when summer is green,
That host, with their banners, at sunset were seen:
Like the leaves of the forest, when autumn hath blown,
That host, on the morrow, lay withered and strown.

For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever grew still.

And there lay the steed, with his nostril all wide,
But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride;
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.

And there lay the rider, distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow and the rust on his mail;
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,
The lances unlifted, the trumpets unblown.

And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!"

So far as the bearing of this incident upon Isaiah's growing reputation is concerned, it needs only to be said that the marvelous accomplishment of his prediction, the precision and the effectiveness of the deliverance, did much to establish his position as the chief of an array of prophets, really unequaled in the history of the Church. And one other interposition of his, when Hezekiah seemed to be dying, himself unwilling to close his career till he had succeeded in upbuilding and reforming the kingdom entirely, added to his power in the state, as a counselor commissioned directly from heaven. For in this afflictive exigency, Isaiah boldly prayed the Lord to lengthen the life of the impassioned monarch as he wished; and in answer to his supplication, fifteen years were added to his allotment of existence, and all the realm knew that such prevalence at the throne of grace was not seen before.

But it is sad to have to say that this did no good, so far as we can discover. The movement of everything seemed to have started to go down hill, and the people kept gliding deeper into sin. Thus hard, for even the best men, is it always to check the progress of what the worst men have begun. This prophet had to be faithful; he must challenge evil in high places and low, evenly and justly, but always firmly, honestly and with due courage. And no man loves faithful dealing; and a coldness soon fell upon the greetings Isaiah received. The man gained some friends, and made many enemies; and by and by came martyrdom.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A SUCCESSLESS MINISTRY.

"Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not."—*Isaiah vi: 9.*

The duty which Isaiah was now pledged to perform was simply what he had understood all along; he was to undertake the work of an evangelist in Jerusalem. He had no settled charge or church; he was bidden and he had agreed to preach the gospel for the salvation of souls; not once only, nor twice, but statedly and persistently, as a messenger of God; the story of his calling to the ministry has grown very familiar:

"Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed."

Here there is added a disclosure of what the result of his life-work should be; he had accepted a successless ministry. The very doctrines he was to proclaim had been dictated to him from the throne before

which he stood in the vision. And now he was informed what would be the effect of his preaching from beginning to end. Though he urged repentance, no one was going to repent; though he denounced judgments, no one would turn from sin; though he should plead for obedience to divine law, no one would mind him; his report would not be believed, nor would the arm of the Lord be revealed. His ministry was to be a hardening ministry; his office was to proffer pardon, but the result would be that men would grow worse; and by doing merely what was his bounden duty he would certainly increase his hearer's condemnation. He was to hold gospel blessings in his hands and present them freely and in good faith, and yet know that by the very sound of his voice the people got deeper responsibilities, and must receive bitterer curses. He was all the time to proclaim inexhaustible mercy, and yet by the proclamations themselves insure the downfall of more wrath; to flash light before an evil man just to blind him; to thunder truth in his ears just to deafen him; to demand repentance so as to render it sure he would not ever repent. You are startled as you read these marching orders; sadder opening never was known for so illustrious a career; heavier burden was never laid on a human heart; yet the Voice had spoken, the man obeyed.

We tell you these things once more, good friends, because it appears to us that you will be constrained to think more kindly of those tender words of counsel

and appeal, those pleading invitations of passionate anxiety, that you are wont to read in the book which bears his name, whenever you recall the pressure of his longing while he uttered them. Think how this bitter infusion of rejection was dashed into the cup of sweetness he had offered to drink. "Here am I," said he; he arose joyfully to go and bear the message of the King; it would be only a pleasure and a glory to do *that*. How he would picture before the open eyes of those men, women and children, the celestial vision he had been permitted to see! How he would kindle their imaginations with an apocalypse of the Monarch in the temple, the bowing seraphs, the grand anthem of their adoration! And then how touchingly he would tell them about the coal brought to his lips from the altar, the atonement given for sin, and symbolized in the sacrifice! All this was enough to swell his heart with gladness; any one would have cried out, "Send me abroad with *that!*" But now, in the moment of exultation, had come this prospect of deadly failure. The people did not want to hear him! In that rejection of his message there must have been heart-breaking pain; if a man so sensitive as he was had actually rebelled, we could not have altogether been surprised. "Oh, must this ever be my lot? Must I always be a presager of doom, a witness for God for his mercy's sake, and yet counted as if for his justice's sake? Am I here now in Jerusalem, with my hands full of flowers for these dear people, wreathed into garlands that, as I offer them, turn to chains,

and grow hot with flames of wrath when I take them in my fingers to bind them on—am I here, with my entire heart and hands and home open to these neighbors of mine, and all I can do for their good brings harm the instant I begin to do it!"

It was no wonder that the sorrow-struck prophet, whose words had been so quickly acquiescent at the first call, quivered now when he awoke to the lurid future into which he was hastening, and asked plaintively, "O Lord, how long? But that inquiry only made his prospect a degree worse, for it was answered with a melancholy candor from above:

"Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, and the LORD have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land."

So, then, this reply only made more evident than ever the hopeless disappointment of his office, and the disaster of Judah's doom. No relief was possible. He must continue to warn, and entreat, and plead, and pray; but he must expect to see only the increase of sin, the debauchment of morals, the growth of sensuality, the decadence of power, with the consequent progress of foreign aggression, the insolence of idolatry in its consciousness of corrupt advancement, the loss of God's favor, the shifting of empire, the crumbling of ruins, and the coming of judgments, the loneliness, the waste, and the ultimate desolation.

And yet, though he quivered, he did not faint.

Agitated even to tears, he did not waver. Quietly he made ready to go forth, preaching peace that would provoke a storm, kindling a light that, for all he in his weakness could do to prevent it, would strike like lightning.

It is not worth your while, my Christian friends, to exhaust the whole of your sympathy upon the prophet Isaiah at such a crisis of his religious and professional experience. The story we are studying just now has a more practical bearing still, and one that much more closely concerns you and me together. What we call "the means of grace," what the Bible calls the "Gospel,"—the whole message that God sends to an intelligent world—has a strange spiritual life of its own. It really does not matter much how it comes into contact with a human soul in the offer of grace; the point to be understood is that it never leaves that soul where it found it. It lifts it or it lowers it. The Bible has said explicitly that it is "a savor of life unto life, or of death unto death." That is, it makes a man better or worse every time it is touching him. It is like pure sunlight that falls on wax, and softens it; that falls on clay, and hardens it; that shines on a straw braid, and blackens it; that shines on a dull ribbon, and bleaches it; and it is the same sweet sunlight all the time. What the gospel of Jesus our Saviour will do, depends upon what the soul is that receives it.

So the question comes down heavily upon you and me, just as then it did upon Isaiah in Jerusalem. There he was, and wicked people were all around him.

Here we are, and wicked people are all around us. It is sober business, this of confessing Jesus Christ as our Saviour, and claiming that we are going to heaven because we are redeemed by him as the gospel provides. That puts us in charge of the gospel for others, and renders us responsible for their receiving it, or their losing it.

Further, this entire matter takes on a more serious aspect still when we consider that the offers of salvation have such varying forms, often such inconspicuous and commonplace ways of getting into a living contact with souls, that they cannot ever be trifled with. Every sermon, every tract, every lesson faithfully taught from the Word of God, may have the whole issues of life and death and hell and heaven in it. Sometimes the crisis on which the destiny of an immortal soul turns is in a single counsel of a pious father; the overheard prayer of a tired wife; a letter from a fervent friend; a warning from a zealous comrade on the street; the ringing of a church bell; the notes of a song which a dead mother once used to sing as she went about her work; the grieved look upon a sister's face as she sees her brother turn the perilous way off into worldliness and sin; every prayer-meeting, every Sabbath, every funeral—each of these is a proffer of God's grace; for it suggests pardon of sin, and danger of delay, and it brings a religious awakening of emotion, and a compunction of conscience. Such things often mould character and fashion destiny and decide doom; they find any man easily, and they never

leave him where they find him. His soul is nearer heaven or further away. If I were to seek for a form of words, in which this whole truth could be fitly phrased, I should find it all arranged by the apostle Paul in one of his epistles written to Corinth: "For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish. To the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life: and who is sufficient for these things? For we are not as many which corrupt the Word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ."

You see quite plainly, then, how serious a thing it is to become a teacher of others, a living epistle of God to human hearts known and read of all men. Any one who changes his demeanor or alters his words in order to escape censure, or in order to smooth over hard doctrines, corrupts his message and becomes a hypocrite. I do not wonder that an ardent Christian like Paul cries out, "And who is sufficient for these things?" The hour of family prayers this morning, this service in the house of God, will enter into the reckonings of the great future. The question of your child, "Father, why do we never have family prayers?" has to be answered; and on your answer, or neglect to answer, may hang his eternal history. We have seen children watching their father upon Sabbath morning, carefully observing their mother as she plans for observing the Lord's day, and taking their cue as to the meaning of that

Fourth Commandment they were forced to learn in the Sunday School. It is dreadful to have children, and then teach them to disobey God for a score of years, and still sing, "We are bound for the land of Canaan!" And I, who stand up here so bravely in "the coward's castle," am not a whit clean of transgression, and I am frightened oftentimes so that my heart quakes and my eyes fill with tears. I may lose my own soul, but I pray on my bended knees that I may not lose the souls of any others!

Is there no relief from such a pressure? There was none for Isaiah; he was charged with a successless ministry. Your ministry is an easier one; so is mine; so was that of Jesus Christ, trying as it was:

"Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing, see not; and hearing, they hear not; neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive. For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear."

These are Jesus Christ's words; he is quoting those of Isaiah which we are studying now. He congratulates himself, you see, that he can have some con-

verts, when Isaiah could have none. So can you and I; and beyond this, we have Isaiah's comfort. Did Isaiah, then, have some real comfort? Yes, indeed: there was the future, the great, blessed, beautiful, far-reaching future! When Jesus Christ came, he did Isaiah the justice which men had denied him. "Who hath believed our report?" the prophet once cried out aloud in his pain of rejection. Come on down a long reach of history; speed away eight hundred years; now ask who believed Isaiah's report! The Ethiopian eunuch believed it—those very words of complaint the prophet was then speaking, those were what this black man read, and was converted. He was the first Christian in Africa! Thus it was that Ethiopia began to stretch out her hands unto God.

Oh, my beloved comrade Christian, whoever you are! do not be unfaithful or downhearted. Can not you afford to take what cheer you can catch now, and remember that is more than the old prophet had, and patiently wait for the rest until the happier Hereafter opens its gates.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE GOSPEL REJECTED HARDENS.

"Make the heart of this people fat and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed."—*Isaiah vi: 10.*

Six times in the New Testament is this passage quoted from Isaiah's prophecy in the Old, and generally credited to him with a directly evangelical reference to the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. In a few instances some slight variations in form are permitted according to the explicit point of instruction which is needed to be enforced by it. But everywhere it preserves unchanged the thought that the prophet gave to the world in it, so full of meaning and relevancy to sinful men who have souls to be saved or lost, namely, that the gospel always hardens the heart which it does not subdue. We have seen that the old message given to Isaiah was nothing more nor less than the message afterward offered to Christendom by the followers of Jesus; it was precisely the plan of salvation which God sent to the world by his Son on the Calvary cross. The nation of Judah would not listen to Isaiah, although he told them the truth. The reason why those people grew worse and worse through all the years in which he preached to them is

openly disclosed in the fact already stated; the gospel is never inefficient, never inoperative, however the direction it takes may vary. It always has a force, it always produces an impression, wherever it falls. You may be sure it softens or hardens, it exalts or it sinks, it redeems a soul or it ruins it. That is the office of it; that is the result.

Now this is what Christian preachers keep reiterating from hundreds of pulpits over the whole world. The reason of our assiduity may be found in the fear that the perversity of some human hearts will insist upon charging over to mere needless offensiveness of Isaiah's industrious work as a prophet, that which really was his commission as it came to him from heaven. The words which we have for our text to-day, taken from his own record of the vision he had of Christ on the throne with the seraphim singing around him, these words are God's words that fashioned his ministry; this is precisely what he was sent forth to do: " Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed." These are the words which our Lord Jesus Christ quoted twice, applying them to his own ministry as well as to Isaiah's; and these are the exact words which Isaiah repeated, as coming from the Lord he served, at a period further on in his ministry, more than forty years after this, when the hardening effect of his faithful preaching was already seen: " Bring forth the blind people that have eyes,

and the deaf that have ears. Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the peoples be assembled: who among them can declare this, and show us former things? let them bring their witnesses that they may be justified: or let them hear, and say, It is truth. Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he; before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour."

Hence, it would be a vast mistake to charge over to Isaiah or to Jesus Christ individually, what was inherent in the very gospel itself. It is the gospel that hardens a sinner when he rejects it, not the man who offers it; and that was its nature and purpose from the beginning. Two things are ever to be borne in mind, to stop cavil of every sort.

One is, that this inherent force of the gospel is owing in no respect to the native tendency or subtle mischievousness of the truth as sent from God for the salvation of men. All saving truth tends in the first instance to purity, and so to the holiness and happiness of sinners. It works by precept, admonition, and example, toward peace and obedience, refinement, exaltation, sweetness and light. And God's own truth, gracious truth, merciful truth, helpful truth, redemptive truth as a whole, is the highest truth and the most sure in this, its best direction. The gospel has no dangerous or mystic alchemy about it which

allows it to entrap and injure a human soul. It offers food, not poison; it gives the children bread, not a stone. To hold it responsible for the hardening and the ruin of a human being who rejects it, is simply unphilosophical and intolerable. It would be like holding the sun responsible for the decay of a corpse; those bright, silent rays were intended to help the living to live, not to corrupt what rejects them.

The other thing which should be borne in mind is that in this utilizing to bad purposes of what was meant to foster everything desirable and good, no direct divine influence is invoked or concerned. God does not harden sinners; they harden themselves. The familiar historic instance in which the expression is used, makes powerfully for these distinctions: God did not harden Pharaoh's heart; Pharaoh hardened his own heart. The Scripture says, God hardened that wicked king's heart, and also that the man hardened his own heart: that is true, and in one most important sense God did harden it. So we go to the story to find out exactly what God did do in the contest; and we discover that Moses was doing all he could do to *soften* Pharaoh, and *that* under the immediate command of Jehovah in person; but Pharaoh perverted the grace.

So let us have a little plain talk, and introduce a commonplace illustration to show precisely what we mean. You and I are out on an ocean voyage in the southern sea. Two huge vessels are in the offing; one is a beautiful ship with every sail spread, white

and bright, with its freight of food, commerce, missionaries, if you will; God is kindly sending his strong winds which "he hath gathered in his fists," and which are "ministers of his that do his pleasure," to swell the canvas of that vessel, now walking the water like a thing of life. The other ship, at the very moment we are looking, runs up the black flag, and a sailor whispers in our hearing, "She is a pirate and a slaver!" Every one on our deck is frightened; we all observe that she is using exactly the same wind to sail with, God's wind, which we are depending upon to get away from her! Unfortunately there is a skeptic and a caviler, a smart infidel or something of that sort who is on our passenger list; he comes up close and remarks: "You are a Christian, I imagine, and it might be a good thing just now for you to pray! Ask your God to catch his winds in his fist again; they are doing all the mischief; they are hardening those pirates' hearts and are encouraging them to grow wickeder all the time; the *winds* are to blame for all the piracy out here. And it is quite so with your so-called gospel; it hardens sinners more than it saves; shut up the gospel! shut up the winds! let men alone!" How do you like that ribald doctrine? You cry out: "What would become of ships? what would become of commerce? what would become of souls?"

You will clear up your confusion, my worried friends, in an instant, by asking yourself the question: "Suppose those pirates intended or wished to repent, give up their voyage of sin, return to port, commence a

new life, go home to church and to heaven, what would the good gracious Lord do for them to help them?" And you would have to reply—"Do just what he is doing for us! keep his winds, and his gospel, with the common providence and grace which he has been using all these days since Isaiah preached as he was told to preach—and Jesus Christ too!" God never hardens anybody; it is the sinner who hardens himself by the gospel while God is trying to soften him with the gospel all the time.

Who, then, is to blame when some people reject the gospel offered them, and are hopelessly lost, or become reprobate before they die? You see now, I suppose, how awful is the conception which this consideration gives of what the old divines used to call "gospel hardening." Familiarity weakens the influence of every rejected admonition. Repetition of what we set our wills intelligently not to receive wearies a great many of us who have pious parents at home. An endless appeal is called "nagging;" and this renderes ill-tempered sons and daughters angrily opposed to everything good. This is truer of religious subjects than of anything else, because the appeal crosses worldly prejudice or attempts to limit some fashionable indulgence. The gospel seeks to awake higher ambitions, to curb low passions, to hold down appetite, to check self-will, to subordinate to proper law. Many a mature man says now, I apprehend: "I was held in too much in my younger days, and some of these objections I have grew out of that; I think

parents make mistakes often." Yes; but, my friend, you were the one that made the decision then which is what makes you so hard now; *you did not do*, as it was told you to do then. Why do you chide them for what you rejected? Their advice is not to blame; you did not take it, you know; you had a will of your own; *it* was what you followed; *that* hardened you then.

We appeal to any man who has reached middle life, and is still a thoughtful man of the world: how many there are within your own circle of acquaintance in this great metropolis of such as came away from the moral homes on New England hills, to whom the Sabbath is but a fatigue or worse, and every ordinance of the church only a habit? You have at last come to be a man, and your childish reverence is all gone. It is true you know more than you did, but you are none the happier for that. Your boys are not as strained as you used to be; nor are they as obedient as you used to be either. Your girls are not quite as timid now, as your sister was when she was a maiden; they are not so affectionate or so considerate to each other or to you and their mother as she used to be in the old home. The world seems changed and hard sometimes for other reasons than over-religiousness. The Bible, if you ever read it now, is wearisome, and that not altogether because it is "nagged" into you in the shape of Sunday lessons. Christian appeals to the Word for authoritative decisions of casuistry sometimes find you reluctant in a conscientious acquiescence; you are

ready for an argument. You are in some regards less trustful and more opinionated than you used to be in your thoughts. Are you not somewhat hardened? Did your father do it? Your complaint of him is, remember, that he tried too much to soften.

> "'It was a childish ignorance—but now 'tis little joy
> To know you're farther off from heaven than when you were a boy!"

Just here the strange conclusion is reached by some persons that it is better to leave young men now to work out their own future. Isaiah was set on a poor errand when he was made to harden the Jerusalem people with homilies they detested. Suppose an anxious parent exercises himself to reform a dissipated son; he tries with warnings and entreaties, with tenderness and tears. The neighbors interfere, and ply him with objections: "You are only making him worse; your words simply exasperate him; let him alone; you are making his case more hopeless." I do not discuss that counsel; the question I am raising is different. If that boy gets hardened, who can be to blame? His father is actually doing nothing but trying to help him in a way that should help him. So God's gospel is doing to a sinner only what would save his soul.

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE CRY OF THE MARTYRS.

"Then said I, Lord, how long?"—*Isaiah vi: 10.*

It would not be fair to say that this language shows Isaiah once at least as a petulant caviler, reluctant if not rebellious under that painful charge he had just received. It may be that the words are nothing more nor less than a question about the length of time he was to be occupied in this discouraging ministry of hardening the hearts of a nation of sinners. He does not seem to have settled down into desperate melancholy, as if he had made up his mind to be sullen; it is very unlikely that he was complaining that God had led him into trouble and now might take means to bring him out. There is not even any evidence of supine inactivity in his conduct, or of mere waiting to see what an awkward and hard future was before him. Isaiah is neither peevish nor purposeless; he simply raises the old question of the ages: "How long, O Lord, how long!" It is the martyrs' cry from beneath the altar.

"And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How

long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them, and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also, and their brethren that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled."

I. It will be well for us, as we take up such a theme as this, to consider the universality of this sentiment to which the prophet gives an impassioned utterance. It was no individual wish he expressed; the cry is more like the sigh of our race, the irrepressible longing of an imprisoned soul for freedom from its fetters. It reminds us of the other outcry of the psalmist, that song of David, when praying for rest:

"And I said, Oh, that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest. Lo, then would I wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest."

This could not have been really a call for death to come and end one's despair. It was, perhaps, only the demand for a new or at least another region or field of employment wherein to work out the problems of life.

And this is as old as the world is, for all we can see; the book of human history is not complete; it has lost some of its early pages. But whatever records it has kept are full of this same wistfulness. A fine old fable was that, taught in the medieval times; the knights were told to think of the vast temple of the Sangreal.

Deep in the impenetrable forest it stood, guarded by its mailed warriors; six and thirty towers rose into the quiet sky, and over them all the grand dome of apocalyptic sapphire; and there hung, just beneath, crystal crosses and curtains of green. The eye of mortal could not behold it yet; only it was sure that the glory remained in waiting. But that structure would be for ever invisible to an impure heart, for ever inaccessible to any faltering or faithless soul. There it shone, up on the onyx summit of Mount Salvage; and he that was brave and holy might one time reach the portal, and so be at rest. Even the Christian Bunyan had his dream of the Land of Beulah where the travelers halted on this side of the dark river, and had a brief breathing-time after their pilgrimage, amid the ringing of far bells and the strains of angelic songs, floating across the stream, as they were wafted from the Celestial City itself.

Thus always: the traditions of human history have kept the hopes of men, ill and weak and miserable, alive. There must be somewhere on this planet of ours a home for the soul, tired with wrestling, fatigued with fight. Call it the " field " of Avalon, the " beautiful vale " of Tempe, the " Hill of the Serene "; always the same, it meant a locality, outside of the roar and the rush, the anguish and the turmoil, of time and toiling, in which one could find peace at last, where weapons were not tearing one's nerves to pieces with clashing, and horns could hang contented on the walls, with no challenge to make for any more war.

But it all meant nothing: the rude world rolled along, and rough gibes of ridicule and rougher oaths of cursing were hurled against the man who would not laugh with the rest, and, when disgusted, swear as other disgusted people did, and so soothe his feelings in the hard pressures of wrath and pain. There was no place ever found; there was poetry, but no fact. If Isaiah had any anticipation that a fresh country or district might, after a while, be looked up for him to work in, out of Jerusalem and away from Judea, he was mistaken and disappointed.

Well, then: if no better spot, surely one might be indulged in a harmless wish for a new and hopefuller time! So some few minds went a step farther down into the regions of fable. They talked about halcyon days, and related a tender little story about a daughter of Æolus, whose husband was drowned in a cruel sea; when the body was washed upon the shore next day this bereaved widow clung to it, and was drifted back with it into the same waves and strangled in the same moment. To reward their pitiable affection, the gods metamorposed them both into kingfishers, and changed the name of the birds to *Halcyons*, and afterward decreed that all seas should for ever remain calm while these devoted creatures built their nests directly on the water. Thus men had fourteen days, called "halcyon days," in which vessels were never even tossed on the billows of the restless main; seven days just before the winter-solstice in which the kingfishers built their nests, and other seven days just after in

which the birds laid their eggs. And down to this day the sailors tell us of the tranquil fortnight in which oceans are merciful and tempests are still; for the halcyons are brooding and the skies are stormless and blue. Patience waits and sometimes sings:

> "And as I watch the line of light that plays
> Along the smooth wave, toward the burning West,
> I long to tread that golden path of rays,
> And think 'twould lead to some bright Isle of Rest!"

It is all useless, fable and poem alike; for there is no time to be given, no spot to be found, when one may be tranquil or where souls can get a release from duty. Yet some will go on sighing even now!

II. So it will aid us some if, in the second place, we consider the sources of this experience. Isaiah was destined to be a martyr at the end of his career. Perhaps he knew it, as Simon Peter knew it; if he did, he understood that he was, for a measurable period, safe away from any violence which could now be fatal. But he would be obliged to go right on with his preaching, no matter what it cost him. We all recognize a force and meaning which belongs to the cry he records different from a common explosion of feeling in view of simple suffering and death. We know that the intensity of the thought, lying beneath the words, varies very much according to one's history and temperament. There are worse martyrdoms than those that the men and women burnt alive at Smithfield market suffered. It is these slow martyrdoms which are the hardest.

There is a weariness of life in its present form which grows out of simple disgust with the world. We have learned the precise worth—or rather, the precise worthlessness—of all it has to offer. In reply to a salutation of "Happy New Year," Lord Dundas once said, "Well, it had need to be better than the last, for I had never a happy day in it!" Though he was a peer in the realm of Britain, he was ready to admit with the Royal Preacher, "I have seen all the works that are done under the sun, and behold! all is vanity and vexation of spirit." The behavior of Absalom outraged every feeling David cherished. His whole confidence was betrayed; he lost his trust in men. We understand this burst of emotion; we appreciate his wish for a dove's wings. No doubt Isaiah would have been glad enough to give his body to be speedily cut to pieces in exchange for the spite and contumely coming daily on him.

Then, too, there is a weariness that comes from circumstances of personal pain. It may be a bereavement in the circle of one's friends has affected him unduly. Edmund Burke's son died, and the statesman's heart was half broken. He wept hottest tears as he hung with childish fondness around the very neck of the horse his boy used to ride. Then all England stood hushed while he wrote: "I greatly deceive myself, if in this hard season I would give a peck of refuse wheat for all that is called fame and honor in the world!" He lived to be happier afterward.

It is not worth while to go on farther into minute specification of bitter experiences. Ill health, bodily suffering, disappointed ambition, ingratitude from from others, jealousy that is cruel as the grave—all these may make us uneasy, and cause us to plead for rest. Want of appreciation, sharp estrangements which cannot be healed, clouded reputation that we cannot clear, but that another gave to us by his crime, which was not ours—these mortify our proud spirits and shatter hopes of redemption or rescue. Some of us have known the hour when we would have been content to see the night come; willing to lie down speedily, and, like children going to sleep, wait calmly for the darkness of the great shadow. We wanted to be out of this—out of this—anywhere!

III. It is not wholesome even to dwell upon such disturbances in our hearts. We turn, in the third place, to consider the moral quality of this experience as a whole. Is it right ever for one to cry out in the bitterness of his soul, "How long, O Lord, how long?" No; that is to say, if it implies rebellion against the lot God has given us. A brave man will manage somehow to be happy. It may not be a mortal sin to lift the martyr's cry, but it is wrong; it does not better anything.

It is needless. This world is not altogether bad. Much comfort is to be found in it. There are brilliant flowers around the edges of the dustiest of parks; there are grand old trees in the forest; there are beautiful paintings and exquisite statues in the galleries;

there are some friends that are true and affectionate. The husband loves his wife; the wife sees with her two eyes that he is glad as he enters the door where she stands waiting to give him welcome. It is not fair for any one to say that life is all threadbare and worn out, and then wail out a great forlorn cry for wings like a dove to get away from it.

It is useless, too. The wings never come in answer to the calls. There is no other place to go to. Dreamland never feeds the children. The far-off look in a melancholy maiden's eyes is not interesting to a brave man who wants to be her friend. There are no castles to let now in Spain. The ships are not coming in for several years yet. Life is commonplace nowadays, and most doves keep their wings for themselves.

It is distrustful to keep sighing so for something else. God is good in giving us what we have; we should make the most of it. It may not be just such a world as you and I would make if we had the contract for a new one; but it is next to the best one in the universe, next to the best one we ever shall know. The Lord is still overhead; he is in the lead of history yet; he is wise and thoughtful and kind; he has engaged to provide for us. Life is not so long as that any one should be crying out constantly, "O Lord, how long! It is the essence of unbelief to wish to change the allotments of divine providence because the days are hard. Say to yourself, "God puts me here; here I abide!"

It is cowardly to say anything else. It is unmanly and unwomanly to try to fly away and shirk duty. What if things are disagreeable and lonely and perplexing and sad? You make them more so the moment a friend sees you and hears your voice. You take down the high spirits of the world just as soon as you begin to mope and cry out, "O Lord, how long, how long?" There are many martyrs *made* by such cries as these!

It does no service, it bodes no good, it brings no peace. For a sighing world like ours more sighs are not a benefaction. The burdens are heavier, the pains are sorer, the lights are darker, and the rests never come. So the lesson reaches its end for us exactly here. Stand in the spot where the dear Lord has put you, and there do your best as Isaiah did after he got the answer to his question. He preached in Jerusalem right on to the end, and we never hear of his crying out in an unamiable rehearsal of his personal woes. He kept sunshiny and happy-hearted, and worked patiently clear up to the very edge of life.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE DECADENCE OF JUDAH.

"And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate."—*Isaiah vi: 11.*

When Isaiah began his public ministry which was to last for more than fifty years, he could not have known all the terrible experiences through which he was destined to pass. But as he received the outline of what he was to do he must have understood some of the implications; for the language was singularly significant. He was to become a "home missionary;" he was to work among his own people. It would be his duty to preach, but never expect a convert; he was to proclaim the gospel, but not hope for souls to be saved. More than that, he was to exasperate and offend his hearers all the time, so that they should grow angry and perverse. No hope in the future; no place for repentance; the light he brought would not illumine, but it would dazzle and blind the souls that he forced to endure it. The truer the doctrines, the gentler the spirit, the tenderer the affection of his address, the wickeder the Jerusalem people would be sure to grow year after year.

It would not be human nature for a man like him

to accept a commission so stringent and yet so hopeless without some sort of deprecation in the depth of his feeling. But he makes no show of recoil when his lips break the silence which succeeds the sound of the sober Voice he had heard. "Then said I, Lord, how long?" Only a question as to a possible date for better things; "How long will this hardening process continue? how long will my work harm instead of help these people?"

"And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate; and the LORD have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land."

Really, then, Isaiah was to be almost as unwelcome as a destroying angel; he was to hasten the downfall of his entire nation. It has been seen by us all in our course of study that this prophet was more alert and gifted in the gospel than any other in the Old Testament. A spiritual education had been given him of rarest apprehension. He had known for many a day that our faculties for usefulness, our capacities for good, do actually become weakened and finally lost by disuse. For example, human beings have a faith-faculty; unless we believe, it must become dormant and at last perish, as certainly as the eye-sight and even the eyes of the fishes swimming in the dark streams of the Mammoth Cave. We have a capacity for inspiration; the Spirit of grace can enter into communication with

a soul; every intelligent man has one side on which he is approachable by God. But nobody can keep that unless a constant use of it preserves the life in it; the Spirit rejected withdraws, and the endowment is for ever extirpated. After that, the soul is just as surely lost as if it were down with Judas in his own place. So, then, we reach the question of fact: was this decadence here predicted actually fulfilled? Some few details of history, taken from the annals of that period covered by Isaiah's ministry will answer the inquiry. For one thing, we find that there was during the whole reach of the fifty years a succession of frightful physical disasters devastating the country. Sometimes the historic books relate particulars.

Allusion has already been made to the great earthquake. The inspired prophecies of Amos and Micah, and more specially that of Joel—all of whom exercised their ministry in this generation—are crowded with references to these alarming visitations from God. The mountains were torn asunder: and such an expression recalls the fact that down in the valley of Jehoshaphat, south-east of Jerusalem, a vast mass of the hill was cleft away by the violence of the shock, which broke over the city; it fell into the royal gardens and blocked up the access to the Kidron brook-bed. This terrible infliction became known in history as the alarm of the age, the one great consternation of that epoch in which it occurred. The land seemed to melt like a a furnace; the earth heaved in ridges like the ocean

billows in a tempest; the hills reeled and staggered like a drunken man; there came a roar on the blast, which historians said was " the Voice of the Lord, as the voice of a lion ! "

But the pest of the locusts was the worst. This must have scared as much as the other; it certainly was the most awful scourge of an agricultural people, and brought the worst devastation that ever swept over the land of Canaan within the memory of man. It is of little use to try, in the poverty of our modern imagery, to show this calamity as it came upon the sensibilities and fears of that nation. Indeed, what the prophets who tell the story have to say is difficult in the Hebrew tongue, the phraseology is so voluminous with terms of horror. Let us read together one passage, as we find it in the account given by Joel, who summoned all the inhabitants within reach to come to a fast, immediately appointed by the priests, rushing on in their garments of terrible black and filling the air with wild cries as they called on God: " Awake, ye drunkards, and weep; and howl, all ye drinkers of wine, because of the new wine; for it is cut off from your mouth. That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the canker-worm eaten; and that which the canker-worm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten. For a nation is come up upon my land, strong, and without number, whose teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he hath the cheek teeth of a great lion. He hath laid my vine waste, and barked my

fig-tree: he hath made it clean bare, and cast it away: the branches thereof are made white. Lament like a virgin girded with a sackcloth for the husband of her youth. The meat-offering and the drink-offering is cut off from the house of the Lord; the priests, the Lord's ministers, mourn. The field is wasted, the land mourneth; for the corn is wasted: the new wine is dried up, the oil languisheth. Be ye ashamed, O ye husbandmen; howl, O ye vine-dressers, for the wheat and for the barley; because the harvest of the field is perished. The vine is dried up, and the fig-tree languisheth; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, even all the trees of the field, are withered: because joy is withered away from the sons of men.

" Gird yourselves, and lament, ye priests: howl, ye ministers of the altar: come, lie all night in sackcloth, ye ministers of my God: for the meat-offering and the drink-offering is withholden from the house of your God. Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord your God, and cry unto the Lord. Alas for the day! for the day of the Lord is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almightly shall it come. Is not the meat cut off before our eyes, yea, joy and gladness from the house of our God? The seed is rotten under their clods, the garners are laid desolate, the barns are broken down; for the corn is withered. How do the beasts groan! the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture; yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate.

"O Lord, to thee will I cry: for the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame hath burned all the trees of the field. The beasts of the field cry also unto thee: for the rivers of waters are dried up, and the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness. A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations. A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them. The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses; and as horsemen so shall they run. Like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains shall they leap, like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble, as a strong people set in battle-array. Before their face the people shall be much pained: all faces shall gather blackness. They shall run like mighty men; they shall climb the wall like men of war; and they shall march every one on his ways, and they shall not break their ranks. Neither shall one thrust another; they shall walk every one in his path: and when they fall upon the sword, they shall not be wounded. They shall run to and fro in the city; they shall run upon the wall, they shall climb up upon the houses; they shall enter in at the windows like a thief. The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble:

the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining: And the Lord shall utter his voice before his army: for his camp is very great: for he is strong that executeth his word: for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?"

The important matter to be noted in such descriptions as this, as well as in those like them found in Isaiah's writings, and voluminously in Jeremiah's, is that in each case the physical visitation is connected with moral and spiritual ill-desert on the part of the families. The troubles of Judah were not so much calamities as retributions; the state of the nation's heart was what was of most concern. Their peril did not arise from their commerce or their politics half so much as it did from their morals. We understand, of course, that these practical dangers came from Assyria on the one hand and Egypt on the other. But what made those enemies formidable was the sin of forsaking God always committed when an alliance was made with either of them; it was the openly-confessed wickedness of it more than the mere impolicy of it.

We take our stand now at a point across the years near the close of Isaiah's ministry. Great changes have taken place; Judah has grown weaker; territory has been wrested away; cities have been destroyed in melancholy succession; new enemies are menacing the borders; armies in every direction are marshaling themselves for fresh attack; the snorting of horses is heard from the north. Social corruption has grown

to an offensiveness almost like a stench in one's nostrils. The worst of heathen idolatries are practiced for the sake of some licentious luxury of worship of voluptuous deities, and a great body of indecent miscreants swell and puff through the roadways parading their debaucheries in the faces of the faint followers of the prophets. No one who reads the records of those dreadful days can fail to see that Judah is abandoned by God, and is fast rushing to ruin in every direction.

The opening chapter of Isaiah is by the best authorities referred to the closing days of his life. It is supposed to have been written during the fourteenth year of Hezekiah's reign, about the time of Sennacherib's invasion; in its discouraging descriptions will be found many denunciations of the prevalent vice which was undermining the nation.

"Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds,

and bruises, and putrefying sores : they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire : your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah."

It is not worth our while to pursue such a rehearsal any farther along the doleful record. Jeremiah joins his voice now with Isaiah's; the "weeping prophet" shows there is a reason for his melancholy. With a relentless persistency he tells the people that the temple will soon be destroyed; Shiloh, where the Ark of God was first established, fell because of wickedness; Jerusalem was going also for the same cause; he bids them remember that Israel had already gone into captivity, and he warns them that Judah was on the verge of death also. For the same abominations there were prepared the same retributions. It was too evident before his eyes, blinded though they were with honest tears, too plain to be denied that the day of grace was ended; fasts and sacrifices, even if they were not hypocritical, would no longer avail. So an unexpected book comes into the Bible, never to go out of the canon for future ages to read, the Lamentations of a broken-hearted seer, who at last had only

sighs and tears to give the people he had loved. so well.

" For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt; I am black; astonishment hath taken hold on me. The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved."

The prediction, that was made in the reply Isaiah received to his question, therefore, was fulfilled. The rest of the history of Judah, dark, desperate, sorrowful, is easily told. Hezekiah's life was singularly lengthened fifteen years; a very doubtful benefit after all. A fresh chance was given, but the nation did not improve it. Hezekiah had a new son, Manasseh, the wickedest man in the Old Testament. Under an infamous reign of his more crimes and worse were committed. Events in reckless and swift succession hasten the end. Among them was the martyrdom of Isaiah himself. God's word is always to be relied upon. It is sin that wrecks a nation, that wrecks a king, that wrecks a soul.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE PROMISE AT THE SUNSET.

"But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten: as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof."—*Isaiah vi: 13.*

A teil-tree is a terebinth; and a terebinth is a turpentine-tree; a native of the countries that lie around the Mediterranean. It is an ordinary sight in Palestine, thought it never appears in forests and is seldom seen even in clumps; it seems to prefer standing alone; the ordinary turpentine of commerce is obtained from it. It is used here in the last verse of this chapter, with the oak, as an example of intense and hardy life; it endures the storms and the winters, sheds its foliage easily, but retains its vigor to put forth its new shoots safely.

One principle of the divine government is made to receive an excellent illustration under this figure. The all-wise God often speaks of "remnants;" he seems to love minorities; he once said he would save Sodom for the sake of fifty good men in it, then for forty-five, forty, thirty, twenty, ten, if so many even as that could be found. The history of the chosen people is crowded with cheering words for any solitary few

righteous men, who are brow-beaten or overborne by the persecutors around them. When he punishes or threatens, he declares the remnant shall return, the remnant shall be saved, the remnant shall begin anew, he will gather the remnant, it shall be well with the remnant of his chosen. So there is always a hope from above for the discouraged.

The meaning of this passage is very plain and comforting. Isaiah has been told to predict the speedy dispersion and captivity of Judah; the nation would be removed and desolation would come on the land:

" But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten: as a teil-tree, and as an oak whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves; so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof."

This faithful son of Amoz is now nearing his end. Fifty painful years of opposition and rejection had worn away his strength. His enemies would soon have their own will with him. He must have seen this as soon as anybody; there were shadows of martyrdom on his path. True men, who sometimes become frightened or dismayed in the performance of perilous duty, will do well to read and read again these chapters that relate Isaiah's history and exhibit his experience. They uplift faith and stimulate zeal. Really, it makes one magnanimous and confident to see how one poor feeble mortal can be upheld by the divine presence at the critical moment when he is confronted by the heaviest odds. Still such a leader as Isaiah always keeps the consciousness that wickedness is

inherently weak and often pusillanimous; it resorts to bravado when its resources are actually at the lowest. Cicero declares it to be an unalterable conviction in his soul that good men have always the swift advantage over evil, because the immortal gods provide, not alone for a general necessity in crises of human exposure, but also for each courageous man in particular; extending their protection, not only to vast continents and whole cities, but also to each of their inhabitants. A mere light of nature unassisted from heaven was enough to show statesmen like these that, when God was with the right, victory was with God.

But with all this trust we are bound to say that human nature at its very highest is so essentially weak that it craves some token from on high in direct speech. God has respected that need and supplied it even from the far beginning when he chose the "father of the faithful."

"For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself, saying, Surely, blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater; and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the

hope set before us. Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil, whither the forerunner is for us entered; even Jesus, made an high Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec."

Let us understand, then, that affairs have grown so serious with Isaiah in these solemn years of his old age that the ever-faithful God sees fit graciously to give him a promise on which he can live, and on which he can die. He was to go on preaching and Judah would go on as ever rejecting and hardening, and the land go on disintegrating; but beyond all this there would be brightness, restoration, and peace. A "remnant" should come back from the captivity, and glorious life was to begin when a new Jerusalem should be builded on the dear old hills!

"For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth. And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD shall name. Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the LORD delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married. For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee:

and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee."

The significant thing in all this covenant is that Isaiah himself is made the mouthpiece of God in its announcement. The pictures of an exquisitely fair future are flashed out one after another; he sees the prospect as he shows it to "the remnant" that waits for the reality to come; he feels the uplifting of each promise on which his soul lives:

"For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem: thou shalt weep no more: he will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee. And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction; yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers; and thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left."

Every day the sky seems to grow clearer; the words of God grow kinder. Sometimes the prophet seems to choose figures of the finest fiber that so he might express fitly the intense fervor of his delicate thought:

"O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colors, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones."

Always the protestations of divine love become more gentle and tender:

"For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee."

This, then, was the grand promise upon which this son of Amoz laid his head as he waited in a dauntless faith for the rough future before him. We pass on to look at the results as we find them in his official career; what do we get for Isaiah's obituary after such experience?

For one thing, we can afford to pause and admire the force of his courage. Has any one ever found that he flinched from difficult duty? Isaiah is always, as the apostle Paul said of him long afterward, very "bold," no matter what he speaks, no matter what he does. That was an unusual period of grievous fluctuation and hypocrisy. There was a delusive falseness of fire in even the best pretension of warmth. It is not the flame of devotion we see, but the phosphorescence. Forth into these shams Isaiah was bidden to go, as a preacher sent from high heaven. He

must rebuke the evil, comfort the good, and discriminate fairly between the two. He must denounce iniquity, and plead for a return unto God—a God who would in no case consent to be mocked. Isaiah is not known to have ever hesitated or betrayed his trust. This evangelical prophet never grows rough or wild, as Ezekiel frequently does; he seems possibly to have entered chambers of imagery less mystical, less filthy and obscene, for sin continued to grow more and more indecent a score of years later. Isaiah hid no girdles. He broke no vessels into pieces. He may be called dramatic in his discourses, but never melodramatic. He went straight toward his end, calling sins by their own names. Always fearless and intrepid, he stood before kings, courtiers, and people, without a tremor. He might have said, as in history, more than a thousand years later, a French marshal was overheard to say, among the bravest of the brave: "I tremble often at the perils to which the necessities of my courage expose me." But he never trembled at any perils to which the necessities of his duty exposed him.

Next, however, put beside this boldness the ineffable gentleness of Isaiah's temper. It is Jeremiah who bears the name of "the weeping prophet" in Jewish history; but Isaiah has all of Jeremiah's wonderful tenderness, though he sheds less of his tears. Absolutely uncompromising in his stand against each public and private wickedness, he is invariably kind and forbearing toward an offender who is penitent, whoever

he may be. He drops from denunciation to appeal with instinctive swiftness of sympathy and patience of consideration. He so blends the Christian spirit of the new dispensation with the sternness of the old that he seems like one standing on Sinai only that he may better point across to the lowlier hill of Calvary. We may consent to call him the Boanerges of the Old Testament: a "son of thunder" when doing his duty under defiance of men; but when, at rest, like John at communion, he is leaning on Immanuel's bosom, his heart melts with matchless love.

So then, in the third place, we must observe Isaiah's integrity. He is one of the men in the Bible for whom we never have to plead with cavilers for charity; his life asks no apology for any passionate outbreak, or any personal spite of injustice. As he began, he continued; he died as he lived. In all the record of the candid chroniclers this man appears a true friend of the right, an inflexible foe to the wrong. We find no need of criticising his behavior as we do sometimes that of Abram, and often do that of Jacob and Moses. He never dissimulated as Peter did at least once, nor in unseemly anger quarreled with his fellow-workers like Paul. We are not compelled to blush for any stain on his purity like that of King David; nor do we fear that he went astray at the last as we dread to think Solomon did. His biography is fair.

There remains now only a small space in which we may consider the melancholy circumstances related concerning Isaiah's death.

It had been predicted of him that his earthly ministry would, in all likelihood, prove a failure. With such direct and fearless proclamations of divine truth, backed by a miracle-working power which availed to turn back a shadow even upon a king's dial, Isaiah grew soon to be detested and feared. He is believed to have reached the advanced age of nearly ninety years; then a fine reward came to him with the crown of a martyrdom, swift, cruel, but steadfastly endured.

It ought to be said at once that there are no settled proofs concerning this as a fact. The story rests upon the authority of rabbinical tradition, and appears in the Talmud. We are sure that the open denunciations he uttered were for a long time treated contemptuously, and compared to the chattering of a witless bird, that would eventually have to be silenced if its voice grew tiresome. There was bitter persecution of the faithful in Judah, and a fierce repudiation of everything good and decent; this occurred in the subsequent reign of a famous sinner, Manasseh, the wickedest man in the Bible. There was at least one massacre in which some of the best servants of God suffered death. And an old mulberry-tree, standing on the spot just below Jerusalem where the valley of Hinnom is merged into the valley of Jehoshaphat, perpetuates with its name—"Isaiah's tree"—what has been declared persistently to be the locality of his execution.

And the tale runs on with calm, dreadful details. Manasseh, the king, charged this prophet with heresy

in that his evangelic homilies controverted the law of Moses. It was a vain and trumped-up accusation on the part of one who certainly had no zeal for God. And so Isaiah knew his hour had come. He thought generously to himself, " If I should excuse my words, I should only increase the king's guilt, but I should not save myself." Hence, he answered not a word, but pronounced aloud the great incommunicable name of Jehovah. This was his last asseveration of the truth in which he had lived, and for which he prepared now to die. A cedar-tree stood close by; it mysteriously opened as the martyr-prophet was led toward it, and Isaiah disappeared in its trunk. Then, at the order of the passionate monarch, workmen took the cedar, and began sawing into it lenghthwise, from end to end. And when the whistling steel drove into his flesh, the servant of the Most High uttered no complaint, and shed no tears. But he ceased not to commune with the Holy Spirit, till the saw had cloven him to the middle of his body; and when the teeth of it reached his mouth, he died.

PROSPICE.

Fear death ?—to feel the fog in my throat,
The mist in my face,
When the snows begin, and the blasts denote
I am nearing the place,
The power of the night, the press of the storm,
The post of the foe;
Where he stands, the Arch-Fear in a visible form;
Yet the strong man must go.
For the journey is done and the summit attained,
And the barriers fall,
Though a battle 's to fight ere the guerdon be gained,
The reward of it all.
I was ever a fighter; so—one fight more,
The best and the last!
I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and forbore,
And bade me creep past.
No! let me taste the whole of it, fare like my peers,
The heroes of old:
Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears
Of pain, darkness, and cold!
For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,
The black minute 's at end,
And the elements rage, the fiend voices that rave,
Shall dwindle, shall blend,
Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,
Then a light, then thy breast,
O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again,—
And with God be the rest!

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